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BLESSED ARE YE.

A SERIES OF SERMONS ON THE BEATITUDES
OF THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT.

BY

DR. THEOL. PAUL KAISER,

PASTOR OF ST. MATTHEW'S LUTHERAN CHURCH, LEIPZIG, GERMANY.

TRANSLATED BY

B. LEDERER,

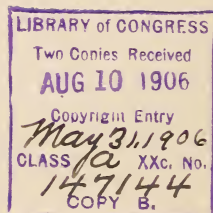
PASTOR OF THE EV. LUTHERAN CHURCH OF THE RESURRECTION,
CHICAGO, ILL.

1906.

THE GERMAN LITERARY BOARD,
BURLINGTON, IA.

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MATTHEW IV. 2—10.

And Jesus opened His mouth, and taught them, saying:

Blessed are the poor in spirit: for their's is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God. Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for their's is the kingdom of heaven.

I.

A PRINCIPAL SERMON OF JESUS.

Matthew 4: 25—5: 2.—And there followed Him great multitudes of people from Galilee, and from Decapolis, and from Jerusalem, and from Judaea, and from beyond Jordan. And seeing the multitudes, He went up into a mountain: and when He was set, His disciples came unto Him: and He opened His mouth and taught them, saying.

Luke 6: 12, 17, 18.—And it came to pass in those days, that He went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. And He came down with them, and stood in the plain, and the company of His disciples, and a great multitude of people out of all Judaea and Jerusalem, and from the sea coast of Tyre and Sidon, which came to hear Him, and to be healed of their diseases; And they that were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed.

Matthew 7: 28, 29.—And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at His doctrine: For He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.

The first sermons which Luther preached, after the Protestant Church had been established in the year 1530 through the Confession at Augsburg, were based upon Christ's Ser-

mon on the Mount. In these sermons Luther's spiritual utterance was especially fresh, clear and powerful, flowing from him like a river from a mountain. A few weeks after his return from the castle of Coburg, acting as a substitute for Bugenhagen, the regular pastor,*) he delivered before the congregation at Wittenberg a series of discourses explanatory of this principal sermon of Jesus Christ. He expressed it as his great desire that his "sermons on the three chapters of St. Matthew, which Augustine calls the Lord's Sermon on the Mount," might be published. Not only did the Reformer, however, preach very suggestively on Christ's Sermon on the Mount himself, but he also urged other pastors to do the same. "Every preacher and pastor is therefore requested and admonished," he writes, "to preserve and promulgate faithfully and diligently, among the flock entrusted to his care, the correct understanding of the Sermon on the Mount." This I desire to do.

Luther considered this important portion of Holy Scripture very necessary for his age. Is it not also very necessary for ours? Does not Jesus also speak very plainly to the children of the present day? The bread of life can not grow stale. The living water is as fresh to-day as when it flowed

*) Bugenhagen was then absent for about a year and a half, reforming the churches of Lubeck and Pomerania. During that time Luther preached in the parish-church as "locumtenens," on Matthew 5—7.

at Jacob's well or from the Mount. Jesus is still preaching. At His feet there is room for great multitudes of people. Wherever His servants proclaim the word of life, there He speaks. Only let us not be like that man who went away from a celebrated preacher with the expression, "I was compelled to hurry off, or he would have made me a Christian." In our sanctuaries tower "the hills from whence cometh our help." It has become sufficiently clear, whither the neglect of religious life, of the divine word and of Christian preaching has led us.

Two of the evangelists have recorded the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew and Luke, the former more in detail.*) One of our new gospel lessons**) comprises the first twelve verses of the fifth chapter of the gospel according to Matthew, embracing the superscription of the Sermon on the Mount and the beatitudes. Thus I was recently obliged to compre-

*) All modern interpreters admit that Luke 6: 12—49 and Matthew 4: 25—7: 29 record one and the same discourse, despite the differences in the two accounts. The best information on the relation of the two accounts to each other can be obtained by consulting Tholuck (Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount), Achelis (The Sermon on the Mount according to Matthew and Luke) and Steinmeyer (The Discourse of the Lord on the Mountain).

**) The author here refers to a new series of pericopes for the Church Year, which have been recommended to be used by the Lutheran clergy of the kingdom of Saxony as texts for their sermons.

Translator.

hend the great wealth of those immortal words of Jesus within the narrow compass of a single sermon. This oppressed me. I was constrained to pass over in silence much which in this connection is important and which should necessarily have been said. We will now more carefully examine every sentence of this sermon of the Lord.

To-day we will only consider what the gospels record immediately before and after this sermon. Even the superscription and the subscription can engage our thoughts. It will give us the key that unlocks for us the sanctuary of the chief of the discourses of Jesus.

A PRINCIPAL SERMON OF JESUS.

2. The subscription: How and what does Jesus preach? preach? The place and the hearers of the sermon.
2. The supscription: How and what does Jesus preach? The manner and the contents of the sermon.

Lord God, hear us when now we call upon Thee, incline Thine ear to the holy conversation of our hearts with Thee. Give unto us words of eternal love and nourish us continually with the bread of life. Take from our soul the dust and the burden of the world, the cares and the sins and the tears, that with a clear mind we may behold Thee and Thy kingdom and Thy glory. Help Thy servants that they may labor and speak according to the Word and after the manner of Thy

dear Son, our eternal highpriest. Give them the watchman's eye and the shepherd's voice that they may lead Thy people to Thee. Great and dear Lord, Thou only Master of souls and eternal preacher of righteousness, let our petitions draw Thee into our midst, and then lead Thou us upon the heights of silent devotion and sacred elevation of the heart. Amen.

1.

I did not begin reading the Sermon on the Mount with the first verse of the fifth chapter of Matthew, as is usually done. The account of it begins with the verse before, the last verse of the preceding chapter. (The division into chapters in Holy Scripture is not always quite correct. It did not originate with the authors of the biblical books themselves, who wrote without making such a division, but it was first added toward the close of the Middle Ages.) The last verse of the fourth chapter, accordingly, tells us where Jesus then sojourned and what hearers had gathered around Him; that is, where and to whom He preached. Luke also had previously given this information. This is the first point upon which we will dwell a little.

We learn that Jesus was in Galilee, but that also from Judaea, not only from the immediate vicinity of Decapolis, but also from Jerusalem, a great multitude had gathered around Him—a full net for the holy fisher of souls, a wide field for the heavenly sower. Ofttimes the multitude remained

with Him for several days, but they caused Him no embarrassment, for He could multiply the loaves and the fishes. Who then would not be satisfied and blessed by Him? Many a time (and here also) they followed Him chiefly to obtain healing and food—but where He pronounced His Ephphatha over the deaf, there sometimes the ear would also be opened to His word. Where He gave sight to a blind eye, there often the inward eye also would be opened to behold His glory. As is still the case, external benefits were often the avenues upon which the kingdom of God entered into the hearts of men. But they also came to hear Jesus. Luke tells us, that even from Tyre and Sidon had come many of those who heard the Sermon on the Mount.

Before such multitudes Jesus sometimes stepped into a boat, sometimes He went upon a mountain. He did so in order to be heard and seen by all from His elevated position. Often He and His disciples and His hearers were surrounded only by desert land, but then He gave them so much the more of the true bread.

The Good Shepherd always knows the green pastures and the still waters. Sometimes Jesus took His disciples aside from the multitude. “Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest a while.” Often in the Old Covenant silent mountain-tops were places of a special revelation. Think of Horeb, Sinai and Carmel. Not only outwardly did they raise their shining summits from desolate regions against

heaven, but frequently they became altars upon which God held holy conversation with his servants. Think of Moses and his shining face, when he descended from the mountain to the people! But here there is more than Moses and Sinai!

Is it surprising that the name of the place, where Jesus preached His Sermon on the Mount, is not designated? That the Evangelists did not think it necessary to mention it? In later times travellers and explorers have gone in search of it and have designated the “horns of Hattin” (Kurim Hattin) as the so-called “Mount of Beatitudes.” It is the same mountain at whose base about a thousand years later a battle was fought. At the very spot where Jesus had once preached of the meek and the peacemakers, there the army of the crusaders was defeated by the superior forces of Saladin in the year 1187. In Luke (chapter 6) we read, that Jesus descended to a place in the plain. Here very probably a level place upon the mountain is meant, which afforded more room for the multitude. But of what consequence is the place and its name? Do we need earthly names, where the kingdom of heaven itself is being built? We are reminded in this connection, that while in the Old Testament external, local fetters were put on the word and service of God, such is not the case under the New Covenant. Jesus did not desire to connect His grace and truth with a certain place, whether it be Gerizim, or Jerusalem, or Rome. The dogma of the pope, that there is a greater degree of grace in Rome, contradicts the gospel.

Where two or three are gathered together in the name of Jesus, wherever His people seek Him, there the Lord speaks from the mountain of His grace, from the pulpit of His word. Where His word is, there is His place.

What multitudes have lived in all the Christian centuries from the time of the Sermon on the Mount down to the present hour! And all these sayings of Jesus are so holy, so sublime and genuine, that the world has been compelled to hear them, nor could they ever be forgotten. Only modern cavilers and sceptics, who would demolish everything, have not hesitated to represent even the principles and demands of the Sermon on the Mount as antiquated and impracticable. The first Christians were more familiar with the Sermon on the Mount than with other passages of the Scriptures. The primitive teachers of the Church deposited the gold of these sayings in their books. Nay, even in the epistles of the New Testament we can upon closer examination discover many expressions which may be traced back to the Sermon on the Mount.*) The opinion has even been expressed, that these three chapters of Matthew are the most important part of the whole Scripture, and if all other parts should be lost, we would here find a sufficient source of salvation. In this respect some have frequently gone too far. But Jesus evidently here delivered a

*) So in 1. Corinthians 7: 10; 4: 12; 1. Peter 3: 9; 4: 14; James 4: 9; 5: 12.

very important sermon before His disciples (who stood in front), and the great multitude. It was not His first discourse, His introductory sermon, as many interpreters have asserted. We read (Matthew 4: 23) that Jesus had already before that time preached frequently. But we are certainly obliged to call this sermon a great principal sermon of Jesus. Matthew has also indicated this by putting such a long super-scription over it: "And seeing the multitudes, He went up into a mountain: and when He was set, His disciples came unto Him: and He opened His mouth, and taught them, saying." The Evangelist tries to describe every external trait of the holy preacher on the Mount himself. Luther says: "Here the Evangelist makes a preface and a great display of words, how Jesus presented Himself for the sermon that He wanted to preach,—so that we can see that He was in earnest." In Luke we read: "And He lifted up His eyes on His disciples." O, to have taken up and carried away the look of Jesus! How much may have been expressed by it! But still the gracious look of His love follows every disciple and the whole multitude of those, who devoutly and believingly hearken to His words. This much for the super-scription, that is, Where and to whom does Jesus preach? The place and the hearers of the sermon.

2.

The subscription: How and What does Jesus Preach?
The Manner and the Contents of the Sermon.

We read that Jesus preached as one having authority. This was the leading impression which the great multitude of hearers carried away from His Sermon on the Mount. He also spoke graciously, especially when He invited souls so cordially with His "Blessed, blessed;" but here we are told above all things, "He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes." The Scribes and the Pharisees, who then were the leaders in Israel, spoke much about external deportment and ceremonies, about human commandments, letters and precepts, about the cleansing of vessels and washing of hands, tithes and fasting—nothing but appearances and empty chaff. There was not that soul-refreshing "Blessed," there was not that heartrending "Woe," which proceeded from the mouth of Jesus. These pedantic adherents to the letter were filled with simulation, hypocrisy and folly, not with heartfelt compassion for souls, not with that pity of Jesus for the people, which made the Lord so powerfully eloquent. On one occasion His enemies, the highpriest and the Pharisees, had sent out their servants to seize Him. But when they came and heard one of His powerful speeches, not one of them ventured to lay hands on Him. They stated as their reason, "Never man spake like this man."

Even Jesus did not consider the preparation for His sermon an unimportant matter. The refreshing showers do not descend upon the fields from clouds of mist that disperse easily. Luke tells us that the Lord before preaching His

Sermon on the Mount continued all night in prayer to God. No one can be great in preaching who is not also mighty in prayer! The more mightily we wrestle with God, the more powerfully will we labor and speak among men. Our addresses to God will be transformed into overwhelming addresses before men. If the Son of God prepared Himself thus for His work, how much more should we! Let us in this matter perceive the footsteps of the Master that point out the right way. The people will then hear through many a discourse and sermon the prayers offered by their pastors and preachers in the silent night, and that force of prayer will be a quiet but mighty power, to lead souls upon the mount of exaltation. Here lay the strength of the Son of man himself. It was then that He appeared as "one having authority." He did not strive to attain the applause of men, as many vain speakers do nowadays. Neither did He fear the opposition of His enemies. And the people, who heard Him, were astonished.

How did Jesus preach? You may read that He spoke mostly in short sentences and sayings. In short sentences there is often more spirit and power than in very long periods. Now He offers us pearls in which the kingdom of heaven is gleaming, now He hurls sharp arrows against lying spirits and infernal powers. There are many points in the Sermon on the Mount and there is often much room left between the several sayings. Why so? It is the will of Jesus that His

witnesses and preachers should say many a thing in addition, which would be especially appropriate for their age and their hearers. I also believe that Matthew did not write down everything which Jesus said in that powerful sermon. Luke has recorded it in a still more abbreviated form. Instead of eight beatitudes He records only four.

What did Jesus preach? His most important word He has placed at the head. It shall be ours to look often at this word as into the clear, heavenly sunlight: "Blessed." Here speaks the one who will bless us. He will not destroy but save us. It is said that Goethe once heard of a man who upon having read his "Sorrows of Werther," had committed suicide. The poet is reported to have said that the world lost nothing by that man. Jesus never entertained such a thought. The soul is in a terrible state, and must be pitied forever, that would not be improved and saved by His word, "Blessed,"—there is nothing greater. Many things, which were the joy of our life, may have been taken from us, but notwithstanding all this we can still obtain the highest good. Jesus will again and again call out in our midst: "Blessed!" Thus He will awaken within us a longing, a hunger and a thirst, that shall lead us to say, coming like an echo from our hearts, "Lord, bless me!"

I saw one hanging on a tree,
In agony and blood;
Who fixed His languid eyes on me
As near the cross I stood.

A second look He gave, that said,
"I freely all forgive:
This blood is for thy ransom paid;
I die that thou may'st live."

These beatitudes we will examine one after the other. Although Jesus condensed them into a few words, yet they will give us much food for thought and much to speak about. The strong light of His sacred truth will illuminate the darkness of this age. The hammer of the divine word must shatter many a delusive image of false righteousness. Into all the corners and recesses of our earthly life, with its cares and all its dark depths of trial and sorrow, Jesus will come and call us forth to follow Him.

Whenever we hear a text from the Sermon on the Mount, may we know that we hear Jesus Himself. May we speak like that disciple whom Jesus loved, who once saw Jesus at a distance, but who notwithstanding the distance exclaimed, "It is the Lord!" May we perceive above every succeeding sermon the superscription. "And He opened His mouth, and taught them, saying;"—and then the subscription—"the people were astonished; for He taught them as one having authority!" May we never hear without this holy astonishment!"

To-day I come to my conclusion early. Luther in his introduction to the discourses on the Sermon on the Mount demanded three things of a preacher: First, that he come

forward like Jesus; secondly, that he open his mouth and have something to say; thirdly, that he know when to stop. Amen.



II.

POVERTY AND THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN.

Matthew 5 : 3.—Blessed are the poor in spirit : for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Luke 6 : 20.—And He lifted up His eyes on His disciples, and said, Blessed be ye poor : for yours is the kingdom of God.

The last word from the Sermon on the Mount which we recently considered, was this : "The people were astonished." Jesus had spoken with the fire of a mighty zeal and of a holy love. Wherever the Master speaks, there astonishment is one of the signs that follow. But was it then among the hearers only an astonishment about the eloquence and the greatness of the Lord? Was it not perhaps also an astonishment about their own inward poverty, about their folly and indolence, perversity and sin? "Holy astonishment!" we might say, "Blessed astonishment!" we might exclaim, under which the new man is born! We will often see in the Sermon on the Mount that astonishment and delight can exist together.

This sermon of Jesus has been called the Lord's declaration of war against degenerate Judaism.*) Certainly. The Evangelists frequently show us the hostile faces of the Jewish Scribes and Pharisees, those formalists and pedants. Long enough had the people been treated to the chaff and the stubble of their doctrine. Luther, too, says in explaining this word,

“the poor in spirit,” that the Lord from the very outset gives the Jews and their great saints a severe blow with these words. We will often have occasion to observe this degenerate Judaism in the Sermon on the Mount. But I ask, Is there no *degenerate Christianity*? Is not the Sermon on the Mount also a declaration of war against degenerate Christianity?

In these discourses we will often be constrained to wage war against many things which maintain among us an unauthorized supremacy. There is a convenient, a very convenient Christianity, if indeed it can be called Christianity at all. The Sermon on the Mount must rouse us from such an easy-going religion, so that we may become true Christians and that we may finally be saved.

We have read only a few brief words from the Sermon on the Mount. But here every word is a sermon in itself. The first beatitude. Some have counted seven, others eight, others nine, still others ten different beatitudes. But the number is of no consequence. There is one bond uniting them all: the word “Blessed.” We will, however, find that the beatitudes are closely connected in many other respects.

Strangely, very strangely indeed, Jesus began His sermon by calling the poor blessed. Usually those are called happy who have great possessions. Jesus seems to prefer those who have nothing. “Blessed be ye poor!” Does it not seem

*) By De Pressensé, a French Protestant theologian.

like reversing the truth? Listen to the people who are passing by the elegant residences in the opulent and fashionable parts of our city! Listen to their utterances, how they, not without envy in their hearts, call happy those who live in the abundance of their earthly goods. Jesus did not thus teach us. He desired to bring to us a different, a higher view of the world. Poverty and wealth, privation and blessedness—great contrasts, poverty and the kingdom of heaven. Jesus knows how to unite all these contrasts. Let this be the subject of our meditation:

POVERTY AND THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN. CAN THEY EXIST
TOGETHER?

1. The poverty which enters into the kingdom of heaven.
2. The kingdom of heaven which comes into our poverty.

Great and gracious Lord, it is Thy will that we hearken to Thy word with fear and with joy, with astonishment and delight, and that we may thus pray to Thee and serve Thee. Shatter the idols that prevent us from serving Thee and which we enshrine so deeply in our hearts. Help us, that our Christianity may not be inactive, lukewarm and impotent, but that it may become truth, spirit and power, action and life. Let Thy word become greater and dearer to us all, a clear light of knowledge and a deep source of blessed peace. O Lord Jesus, do Thou ever rise higher in our estimation! Make us all to be spiritually poor and yet blessed. Amen.

1.

We understand that Jesus began His powerful Sermon on the Mount with a word of fundamental significance. Such a word we will find in this first beatitude. He who leads us upon the narrow way to the eternal city of the kingdom of heaven, here introduces us into the society in which we are to move. Jesus will enter upon this journey with poor people, and He says to His disciples: "Blessed be ye poor!" He said once of His preaching, "The poor have the gospel preached to them." Who are these poor?

Jesus here refers to the Old Testament, both with His "Blessed," which occurs in a few Psalms,*) and with these poor whom He calls blessed. There are passages in the Old Testament where the words "poor" and "pious," like "rich" and "ungodly" are used as synonyms.***) It may often be observed that people in the distress and poverty of this life more than in prosperity and abundance put their confidence in the Lord. In our day we still see the Jews throughout the world dancing continually around the golden calf of wealth, their idol. We cannot serve two such different beings as God and mammon. Luther says: "This was the sum total of their doctrines: if a man is prosperous here on earth, he is blessed

*) Psalm 1: 1; 41: 2, etc.

**) Psalm 73: 12; Ecclesiastes 5: 13; Isaiah 53: 9; Psalm 69: 33, etc.

and fortunate.” Not infrequently the rich in Israel were the oppressors and extortioners of others.*) Such conditions still prevailed at the time of Jesus. But the poor and the oppressed, the publicans, the fishermen, those that labored, the servants with one talent, were then waiting for the consolation of Israel, and when it came they received with joy the saving word of Jesus. Nay, even of Jesus Himself it is written in the Scriptures, that for your sakes He became poor (2. Corinthians 8: 9). Surrounded by this blessed poverty, in the stable and manger of Bethlehem, in the carpenter’s shop of Nazareth, in the poor highlands and maritime towns of Galilee, was His earthly dwelling place. There are plants which especially in tender youth do not need rich ground, but poor and light soil. Just so Christianity. Just so this tender plant of the kingdom of heaven.

The first Christian congregation in Jerusalem was poor, so poor, that Paul in Corinth and elsewhere raised collections for them. Jesus said that a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven. James, who has rightly been called an interpreter of the Sermon on the Mount, said of the first Christians: “Hath not God chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith?” But of the Pharisees we are told that they were covetous. Poverty may be to us an angel that leads us into the kingdom of heaven. Avarice and covetousness are

*) Psalm 14: 6, etc. Compare James 2: 6.

messengers of Satan that destroy us. We can well understand that Jesus, according to Luke, said to His disciples, these poor disciples, in the Sermon on the Mount: "Blessed be ye poor!" These men had left all their small possessions, to which people in humble circumstances are often so closely attached, in order to follow Jesus and to live with Him in His kingdom. Here both were united, poverty and the kingdom of heaven.

But here arises a question. Has not the Roman Catholic Church then a Scriptural right to demand of her monks absolute poverty? Were not the poor people of Lyons, the Waldenses right, when they gave away their possessions, so that they might not be rich disciples of a poor Savior? To this we have to say, that even if Jesus did once, in order to test the sincerity of the rich young man, demand from him to sell his great possessions, He did not intend this to be a rule and pattern for everybody. Also Nicodemus and Zacchaeus, who were rich, were among His friends.

But this I must say: There are some rich people who ought not to be quite so rich. It would be better if they were poorer. If they were poorer they would be more blessed. Many of the rich ought to become poorer by giving their riches away, so that they might become richer, richer in heart, richer in God. There are many hearts into which the kingdom of God cannot enter, because they are so full of the goods of this world. That immoderate capitalism and those colossal manufacturing establishments, that senseless competition and

the puffing advertisements of the present day are not in accordance with the Sermon on the Mount. All this has not brought upon us any happiness, but much confusion and distress. Will we ever get out of this? Mammon is an evil tyrant who works his servants to death. Jesus wanted to break the chains that fasten us to the world and mammon.

O that we our hearts might sever
From earth's tempting vanities,
Fixing them on Him forever,
In whom all our fulness lies.

But Jesus according to the account of Matthew called blessed the spiritually poor, not those who are merely poor in earthly goods. Luther says very correctly in his explanation of the Sermon on the Mount, "We may find that many a beggar, asking for bread at our door, is more proud and wicked than any rich man, and many a shabby peasant, with whom it is harder to agree than with any lord or prince." *Poor in Spirit*,—what does this mean? This is the only passage in the New Testament where this word occurs. Different explanations of it have been given. Let us cast the sounding-line of our investigation into all the depths of this word.

It has been supposed that to be "poor in spirit" means to bear our poverty in spirit, i. e., with a patient, Christian spirit. Others have said, Poor in spirit is he who in spirit, i. e., inwardly, is free from his possessions, who does not set his heart on them. Still others have thought that here people with a

poor, weak mind are meant, simpletons and idiots. But Jesus did not here desire to call blessed the foolish mind. Neither are those the spiritually poor who are "poor in courage." Other interpreters have said that he is poor in spirit who is devoid of the Holy Spirit and longs for Him. But must we not be enlightened by the Holy Spirit if Jesus is to call us blessed? Many others explain: The "poor in spirit" are the humble. Similarly we read in the Old Testament: "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom!" "Let not the rich man glory in his riches!" The same thought is expressed by the Christian poet:

Lord, if Thou Thy grace impart,
Poor in spirit, meek in heart,
I shall as my Master be,
Clothed with humility.

We may accept much as true in these explanations, but they all do not give the original signification. The poor in spirit are rather those who in the Spirit, i. e., enlightened by the Holy Spirit, realize all their human poverty,*) who do not say like the Laodiceans, "I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing." Here the rich like Nico-

*) Compare especially Steinmeyer's ingenious work: *The Discourse of the Lord on the Mount*. A contribution to the solution of its problems. Page 27, etc. Also G. Chr. Knapp, *Scripta varii argumenti*. Volume 2, Page 357.

demus, Zacchaeus and Joseph of Arimathea stand side by side with the publican in the temple, with the diseased woman who in anguish and faith touched the hem of Christs garment, and in the midst of all poor disciples, those that “labor and are heavy laden.” They are all poor, impotent and small before the holy greatness and grace of the Lord, they all need His strength, assistance and Spirit, they all pray and implore Him, “Lord, help us!” That is no mere conventional prayer. It is the Spirit who sighs and implores through us! These are the poor in spirit.

We must tear off every mask and cover from our haughty nature, so that nothing but bare poverty remains. Although human virtues are not glitterng vices, as has once been said, we see nevertheless that the outward show of our own righteousness is not sufficient to cover our human nakedness. The beginning of true discipleship is in the depths of inward poverty. Every river begins as a rivulet. Every man begins as a child. The Christian also must begin in a small way, he must always be humble, so that the Lord can bestow upon him His greatness and power. Are you surprised that Jesus suffered the little children to come unto Him? Are you surprised that the smallest children are baptized and received by Him? The Lord’s blessing, gracious hand upon the head of a poor child—is this not also an explanation of this word about the poor, of whom Jesus said: “Theirs is the kingdom of heaven?” Why did Jesus promise the kingdom of heaven to

children? Why did he demand of the great that they become like children, if they would enter into the kingdom of heaven? Because He wants us to be poor in order to make us rich. As a child I will at the last throw myself into the arms of His heavenly mercy, just as my parents have already in baptism laid me prayerfully into the bosom of His eternal love, I will pray to the end,

As a little child relies
On a care beyond his own,
Knows he's neither strong nor wise,
Fears to stir a step alone:
Let me thus with Thee abide,
As my Father, Guard, and Guide.

Here both exist together, poverty and the kingdom of heaven.

The Lord will have publicans in His temple on Sunday. Penitent sinners will the Lord receive into His heavenly glory. The haughty Roman Emperor Julian scoffed at this spiritual poverty, at this first beatitude. The ancient heathen world could not comprehend it. But the Christian must day by day remember the great weakness of human nature. Every Sunday our spiritual poverty is made known to us in the confession of sins. Let us not with the lips only employ these humble, penitent words, calling ourselves "*poor* sinners," whilst at heart we remain proud and pharisaical. For it might be that God's opinion of us would be similar to the opinion of that wise man of old, in an age when the outward

renunciation of the world was much thought of by many. He said to a man who ostentatiously wore a shabby, threadbare garment, "Through the holes of your garment I see your pride." I have tried to show you the poor in spirit and I hope you have recognized them. I hope that it has helped you to know yourselves a little. We have looked into the depths of our poverty, we have become acquainted with the poverty that enters into the kingdom of heaven.

2.

The kingdom of heaven which comes into our poverty. Jesus calls blessed the poor in spirit, and He gives the reason for it: "Theirs is the kingdom of heaven." I can not dwell much longer upon these words, however inviting and significant they are. The kingdom of heaven—this expression is only used by Matthew; the other evangelists term it the kingdom of God. But this is no essential difference. The only difference is this, that the Lord according to Matthew's account leads us at once upon the blessed heights of the kingdom of God. Yet the Lord does not say, "The kingdom of heaven will be given to the poor in spirit;" no, it "*is* theirs," it "*is* yours." There is a great assurance in this "*is*." The kingdom of heaven becomes through it something already present. We are to receive the powers and gifts of the kingdom of heaven already here on earth, in the midst of our human poverty. That wise man of Grecian antiquity would,

as is well known, call nobody happy before his death. We know what he meant. But the Scriptures do not speak so reservedly. Jesus said: "Blessed *are!*" Jesus shows us a blessedness which is carried right into this world and the present time. Thus both can be together: Poverty and the kingdom of heaven.

"Heaven on earth!"—This is a Biblical thought. You know the expression. Certain demagogues hold it up before the poor of the present time as the dawn of a bright, rosy, inviting future. Yet not the heavenly manna, but the flesh pots of Egypt are their heaven on earth. Those who promise to advance such a kingdom of heaven on earth will find it very difficult to make good their promise. Neither is it appropriate to employ sacred terms, Biblical ideas and the great, golden words of the kingdom of heaven to designate the gratification of worldly passions. There are some other people who seek their heaven in this world and who imagine that the kingdom of heaven is a great earthly enjoyment. We should rather transform this earth into heaven and not lose sight of the real kingdom of heaven which is not of this world and for whose coming we must daily pray. To transform earth into heaven—this is what Jesus intended to do by His appearance on earth, as it is written, that through His poverty we might be rich. To transform earth into heaven—this is what the disciples and the first Christians intended to do, of whom we read: "As poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing,

and yet possessing all things.” They made many rich and became rich themselves. Where did they have their treasures? In the kingdom of heaven, but also here on earth already did they possess heavenly treasure in earthen vessels. They possessed the righteousness of God, they possessed that love which makes us rich, they possessed a precious inward peace and unspeakable joy. Joy—also a great gift of the kingdom of heaven in the midst of our poverty. You may be poor, nay, you even must be poor, but the Lord who has charge of and governs the kingdom of heaven, says to you: “I know thy poverty, but thou art rich,”—and what is still more, “blessed!” Thus both are together: Poverty and the kingdom of heaven.

Dear Christian friends, the Lord Jesus Christ would open with this word the door of the kingdom of heaven unto you, and I am to tell you, “Come! the kingdom of God, the kingdom of heaven is yours!” Once more we find the same sentence: “Theirs is the kingdom of heaven” toward the end of the beatitudes. There it is applied to the persecuted, who with their heart should flee from the sorrow of their time to the kingdom of heaven. We will let the Lord with these words from the Sermon on the Mount now and again open unto us the door of heaven, and we will often look into it. God grant that we may obtain anew the gifts and powers of this eternal kingdom from these beatitudes! And this I will say in addition: It must have been a strong, holy assurance, with which Paul once wrote, “For our conversation is in heaven.” It

must have been with a feeling of profound, heavenly joy that the evangelist Matthew recorded this Word of Jesus for the blessed poor: "Theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Amen.



III.

MOURNERS, AND YET CALLED BLESSED.

Matthew 5: 4.—Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.

Luke 6: 21, 25.—Blessed are ye that weep now: for ye shall laugh. Woe unto you that laugh now! for ye shall mourn and weep.

Mourners, weepers, and yet called blessed! Jesus leads us upon great heights in these beatitudes, but He begins in the depths below. In this life we must go through deep valleys. We have just been looking into various depths of poverty. To-day Jesus shows us those that mourn and weep. Do you not believe that these mourners and the poor in spirit are closely related?

There was a time in our life when we knew nothing of mourning: the happy time of childhood. We wept, it is true, we even wept much, but those tears were childish tears that soon dried off again. I would not assert that no one can be afflicted with sorrow in early youth, but it is not the rule. At that time we at the most understood but dimly what it is to mourn, when we saw the mother in sorrow. We looked on when the sick or the dead were carried away from the street where we lived, but it did not cause us much thought or sorrow. Life was a merry play. The poet has therefore sung about childhood, which is without suffering: "O blessed, O

blessed, to be yet a little child !” We like to hear this. Is it then not strange that Jesus here calls blessed these who truly mourn ? There must after all be a more profound wisdom in this saying of Jesus than in that heart-thrilling song of blessed childhood, which we so easily understand. After we had grown older, having arrived at the age of more serious reflection, we perceived more of the sufferings of this world. Later on there were times when our cares awoke with us in the morning and retired with us at night. They even haunted us in our dreams. We did not yet know the art of that Christian statesman (Axel Oxenstierna), who every evening comforted himself about his many cares and, as he said, took them off with his clothes. We pitied ourselves. Perhaps others also pitied us. And yet—Jesus seems to have quite another opinion, He can call blessed those that weep and mourn. It must be another viewpoint from which He considers our sorrow. It may also after all be a different mourning from that which we usually understand. The second beatitude is to be the subject of our meditations :

MOURNERS AND YET CALLED BLESSED !

1. For what they mourn.
2. Why they are called blessed.

Lord, Thou true Comforter, we must first come into Thy presence with our prayer in the name of Jesus. Grant unto us a more prayerful frame of mind, more inclination and zeal

for prayer. Grant that especially in our sorrows we may think much of Thee, and that even our sighs may become the language of prayer, so that we may not utter them in vain. And when, in deep anguish, body and soul cry for Thee, as a lost child for his mother, then grant to our hearts so much more Thy consolation and peace. Bless the contemplation of Thy word and let the utterances of Thy servant be not a sowing upon stony places, among thorns and by the wayside. Let Thy word fall into good ground among these who hear. Amen.

1.

Not only here, but in the whole Sacred Scriptures great importance is attached to mourning. You know the Old Testament story of the great sufferer Job. You know from the New Testament how frequently the miserable, the blind, the cripples, the lepers were by means of their very sufferings induced to believe in Jesus. Thus Luke recorded from the Sermon on the Mount the words: "Blessed are ye that weep now: for ye shall laugh." "Woe unto you that laugh now! for ye shall mourn and weep." Think of the poor Lazarus, who in his great sufferings was yet so near to the bliss of heaven! Think of the rich man, who in the midst of his daily amusements and banquets was so far from true blessedness. Is it not written in the Old Testament in Ecclesiastes: "It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting," "Sorrow is better than laughter: for by the sad-

ness of the countenance the heart is made better?" Even in the ancient pagan world many thoughtful people became uneasy and timorous when nothing but good fortune befell them. They believed this to be an omen of great misfortune. In the Christian middle ages many people intentionally created sufferings for themselves. They would thus train themselves for the kingdom of God and attain a greater perfection. They mortified their bodies and the so-called flagellants flogged themselves till the blood came. A well known Christian of that age caused himself daily pain by putting on a leathern shirt, supplied with points of nails inside—self-chosen misery. It was more artificial, unnatural and unnecessary than the monastic vow of poverty. But also about imaginary sorrows we should not mourn. They also are self-chosen sorrows.

But when God sends or permits an affliction, or when we sit and "weep with those who weep," we must not believe that this does not belong to this poor life at all. Goethe, who in reality enjoyed this world, was not in the wrong after all, when he said, that everything in the world can be endured except a series of happy days. It is deplorable that most of the people of the present day think that only a life of idle amusement is worth living—such are those that laugh now, who will once mourn and weep! It is greatly to be deplored that so many in our city spend, nay kill almost every Sunday in this uncontrollable passion for amusement and sport. When do they find time for quiet reflection, for that which Sunday

is really intended for? And conditions are not getting better, but rather worse. On those sacred days we ought rather to experience something in our heart of a quiet, spiritual mourning. Then our soul would be more filled with peace and more blessed in reality.

Ofttimes therefore God puts men into a special school of suffering. Whoever we may be, we all need to mourn. No summer ought to have only warm, bright sunshine. The farmer also needs gloomy, rainy days. The sailor must also have different wind to swell the sails. It is just so with the ship of life. Mourning also has its promise and its place among the beatitudes of the Savior.

When through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie,
My grace, all-sufficient, shall be thy supply;
The flame shall not hurt thee; I only design
Thy dross to consume, and thy gold to refine.

Thus the Scripture shows us mourners and weepers, who are yet called blessed. We must of course not understand external weeping. Just as little is external laughing meant here. Laughing is not forbidden. Weeping is not demanded. Luther says in interpreting this passage of the Sermon on the Mount: "Just as he is not called spiritually poor who has no money or nothing of his own, but rather he who does not covet it, nor put his confidence or trust in it, as though it were his kingdom of heaven; so he does not mourn and weep who outwardly hangs his head, looks cross and never laughs, but he

who does not seek his comfort in having a pleasant life here on earth." Those morbid people who are so easily put out of humor are not called blessed here, nor the tearful eyes of those who are always inclined to cry and to complain. You know the word of the imperial sufferer: "Learn to suffer without complaining!" Remember it, you who are afflicted with sickness; you who when racked by physical pain, must now and then feel that yours is almost a living death. Remember it, you who must carry your burden of sorrow, you who are slighted by others and must be silent while your enemies laugh. This is not the real, profound sorrow which brings tears to our eyes, Luther again says, "but it is the great, heavy blows which assail and smite the heart, so that we can not weep and dare not complain about it to any one!" Remember that the Savior Himself was a great sufferer who never complained, and that at the head of all the brethren He calls out to you, "Follow Me!" Peter also informs the sufferers in his congregations: "And if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye." (1. Peter 3: 14.)

Those who stand weeping at the grave are especially called mourners, whether they weep for their loved ones who have departed, or whether they weep rather because they themselves could not go with them. But whatever the sorrow may be which you carry through this life, there is a holy design in affliction. Eternity will clearly show what we owe to our grief, our sickness, in short to our manifold sufferings. The

Scripture shows us mourners and weepers who are yet called blessed.

Although I have mentioned many things for which we mourn, yet I have not pointed out the source of all sufferings, the principal evil and the fundamental sorrow of our race. Many interpreters in explaining this passage of the Sermon on the Mount think only of this principal evil. They think of the sorrow which was expressed by the tears of that "woman which was a sinner." They think of the yearning and the wretchedness of the prodigal son. I often think of a man who lay on his bed, wretched and sick: "Pastor," he said, "I know very well that everything would be better, if I myself were better." Then with tears he would read in a devotional book, following the lines with his finger like a child. With such a spirit, we would complain less about outward distress, and would not always be saying, "I have not deserved this." The Bible constantly reveals the profound connection between sin and sorrow, including the sorrow of death. Genuine Christian mourning passes over into repentance.* Outward sorrows and afflictions also are messengers of God that stand before us like preachers and spiritual advisers. As the goodness of God, so also His severity must lead us to repentance. Our sorrow must thus become that godly sorrow which worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of.

We should also mourn over the sins of others, just as Abraham mourned for Sodom and Moses for Israel; just as

Jeremiah took up his lamentations for his beloved, fallen people; just as Jesus wept over Jerusalem, because they knew not the things which belonged to their peace; just as a father and a mother weep and mourn over a lost child,—all this is a Christian holy mourning and weeping. These are the mourners of whom Jesus speaks. We see for what they mourn.

2.

Why they are called blessed. Jesus expressly says *why*. There is no beatitude for which a definite reason is not given. We read of the mourners that they are called blessed because they shall be *comforted*. Into the bitter waters of Marah, which Israel could not drink, a tree was put, according to the direction of God, which could render the bitterness sweet. Thus the comforting voices of Holy Scripture come into the bitter waters of weeping, suffering humanity. "*Comfort ye, comfort ye my people!*" Someone recently remarked that comforting is easy. Ah, I tell you, comforting is hard. One of our poets says: "Comfort comes from heaven; of men we expect assistance." We pastors would not be able to comfort those that mourn if we had not received the comfort from above.

Frequently in the Holy Scripture not words or thoughts, but persons are called a *comfort*. Noah already was called "rest" or "comfort." Paul was *comforted* by the coming of Titus. But above all the expected Messiah is called the com-

fort, the consolation of Israel.*) Some people by their very appearance are a comfort. When the gentle mother steps into the chamber of her sick son, she is for him a comfort. The Scripture also makes use of this similitude: "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you." But what no mother can do, he will do! Here are the eyes of love, the hands of omnipotence that can even drain the sea, so that we can find a pathway there. The psalmist says, "Thy rod and Thy staff they *comfort* me." This comforted the people of Israel so much that in the wilderness and night they constantly looked into the fiery pillar of His love. "Lo, I am with you always," Jesus says to His own. As the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ. He who destroys the proud, can also heal the wounded hearts.

Those who mourn are called blessed because affliction unlocks the heart, so that the consolation from above can enter into it. I could tell you of many who often had to undergo a crushing sorrow, but who said that it caused them to go down on their knees three times every day. Will we not under such circumstances receive true consolation and realize that the Savior is near, who says, "Lo, I am with thee?" True mourning is a progress upon the way that leads to eternal life. Many a father who sought a lost son in sorrow and prayer, perhaps

*) Isaiah 61: 2; Luke 2: 25.

thus himself first came to his Savior and his God. Often God takes away one of your loved ones, but into this empty place, into this void of your life He will come Himself, so that He may be your consolation. This is what the Scripture calls comfort. Cheerful confidence in Him, this brings comfort. Blessed are they whose consolation is the Lord.

Do you inquire then, why you must suffer more than others? Behold the lonely tree upon the summit or the Jewclivity of a mountain. It is more lashed and shaken by the tempest than its brothers in the quiet valley. But it is also more kissed by the sun of heaven and it strikes its roots deeper into the firm ground. Thus those who mourn most are comforted more abundantly; they are closer to the heavenly Comforter, and therefore are called blessed.

It is said that those who mourn are comforted when they can speak to a friend about their sorrow and thus unburden their heart. Well then, here is the friend of souls, before whom you can do this, and unto whom you may pour out your whole heart. And when you come to Him with your sorrow for sin (why do you not come to Him thus more frequently?), a poor sinner with the confession of the publican, with the tears of Peter, here is your comfort: "Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee." I can well understand that the mental anguish of King Charles IX. of France was relieved when he listened to the penitential psalms which a celebrated master had set to music for him. This is the most comforting

message, that Jesus receives sinners. Of this consolation you must take hold once more with your whole heart, O child of God, when you are weary from roving and wandering through this world, and when you go into the chamber of death—a mourner, but comforted, and therefore called blessed.

“Blessed!” says Jesus. Now notice, how even the bliss of eternity He calls a comfort! The voice comes to the rich man, who had only laughed here on earth: “Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is *comforted*, and thou art tormented.” There in heaven it will be all fulfilled: “Blessed are ye that weep now: for ye shall laugh. Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be *comforted*.” The apostle Paul also speaks of this “*everlasting consolation*.”*) The Lord Himself will be our consolation forever. Then we will look back, if the Lord is gracious unto us, from that eternity of comfort, upon this poor, little earth. There it was, there was the chamber where we once shed our tears—tears of our spiritual childhood, which although painful to our feeble nature, yet soon dried off. “Yet a little while!” From the earth also towards heaven, from among the weeping, from the graves it sounds, “Behold, we count them happy which endure.” What are these which are arrayed in white robes? *These* are they! Mourners they were but comforted,—comforted here, and

*) 2. Thessalonians 2: 16.

there eternally. Heaven indeed overarches every place on earth, but over the dark places, over those that mourn, it must be most radiant. Therefore I say, Mourners, and yet comforted, yet hoping; mourners, weepers, and yet called blessed! Amen.



IV.

MEEKNESS, TO WHICH IS PROMISED THE EARTH.

Matthew 5: 5.—Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.

In the beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount the earth is promised along with the kingdom of heaven. And this is well. The opponents of Christianity have often enough charged against the Bible that it only refers to heaven. There are indeed interpreters who say that *here* there is no difference at all between the earth and the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven. But why did Jesus then not say: "kingdom of heaven?" He must have had his reason for this.

Luther in explaining this verse of the Sermon on the Mount, and looking back upon the first beatitude, asked the question, "But how does it agree, to be poor and yet to inherit the earth? It seems to me the preacher has forgotten what he said in the beginning. For if one is to inherit the earth and its possessions, he cannot be poor." We will find that these poor must not in every respect *remain* poor and wretched. We shall see that the mourners and the meek must not forever relinquish all that pertains to this earth. The earth is only a small province of the great kingdom of God, but it is a part of His kingdom. It is the will of the Lord, our meek king, unto whom is given all power in heaven and in earth, that also on earth His own should wear a part of His purple. For they serve and rule with Him.

Have you never observed that affliction makes a man meeker? Sorrow very often like a knife and a file can take away the angles and points from a rough and harsh temper and polish it. Has not many a flinty heart been softened by tears, so that it became more gentle? And on the other hand we will need very much the holy calmness and strength of meekness, if we would mourn as we should. The one leads to the other.*) Listen then to these exhortations and promises. The subject for our consideration will be

MEEKNESS, TO WHICH THE EARTH IS PROMISED.

1. It seems to be weak and is yet a great power.
2. It seems to retreat, and yet it can conquer the earth.

Lord, we will first ask Thee to bless us again. Thou merciful Lord, full of meekness and goodness, come in this hour very close to our heart with Thy truth and Thy grace. O come and fill our souls completely with the radiance of Thy

*) We prefer to let the meek stand close to those who mourn, and this sentence in the place which it occupies in our Bible. In some manuscripts and editions of the New Testament the saying concerning the meek stands immediately after that concerning the poor in spirit (verse 5 before verse 4). Some interpreters, who prefer this position of the verses (Achelis and others), are of the opinion that Jesus wanted to place beside the kingdom of heaven, in the first beatitude, the earth in the second as a supplement.

gracious love, with Thy fatherly mercy. Quench within us the evil spirit of peevishness, and adorn us with meekness, the beautiful gift and noble fruit of Thy Holy Spirit. Prepare the way so that the word of love and of earnestness, of exhortation and promise may go home to our hearts, and that we may then go forth in the power of Thy word, to perform it earnestly and willingly. Amen.

1.

Jesus with this word also desired to fulfill and complete the sayings of the Old Covenant. The praise of meekness resounds in the Old Testament, proceeding from the mouth of the psalmists and prophets. Especially is the Messiah portrayed as the king of meekness; or—to take another prophetic word and picture—as the Lamb that carries our sorrows and is dumb before her shearers, and openeth not her mouth. Then how vividly does the Passion of the New Covenant show us this meek sufferer, who, when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, threatened not. The most powerful Sermon on the Mount which Jesus left us, He really delivered to us from Calvary by His sufferings. Was this meekness impotence, or was it strength?

It is generally supposed that in order to rule, to possess the earth, we need the sword and the throne, courage and power. But I tell you that meekness is both courage and power, skill and strength. There is after all no courage greater

than meekness. It is quiet and yet strong, and a real great power in the world. Battles must be fought in life in which the sharpest and most powerful sword cannot help us. That old church father was perfectly right when he said that nothing is more vehement, i. e., more powerful, than meekness.

The Jews desired another kind of Messiah, one who would not bear, but inflict wounds; not a meek and suffering, but a mighty and victorious Savior. Did the Scribes not understand the Scriptures better than that? Meekness seemed to them to be weakness. They did not know that meekness is the greatest strength. It has always been a sign of inward weakness, when in the affairs of the Church force and war, the torture chamber and the stake were used. When Jesus was not received, as for instance by the Samaritans when He traveled through their country, He went quietly away to another village. He did not command the fire of wrath and destruction to come down from heaven, as His disciples desired who were then often still so injudicious. Do you know not what manner of spirit ye are of? The Lord in Elijah's prophetic vision was not in the wind and the mighty earthquake, but in the still small voice. Such a still small voice, as from the palm-groves of eternal peace, is characteristic of the mild gospel. Thus the Lord Himself appears in the midst of passionate humanity, calling blessed the meek and even promising them the earth, for they are stronger than the mighty. O ye gentle hearts, Jesus has called you blessed. He would put His easy yoke upon all, and calls out

into the world, "Learn of Me; for I am meek!" And from the midst of His Church comes back the answer, Who is like unto Thee? and the prayer ascends,

Quiet, Lord, my froward heart;
Make me teachable and mild;
Upright, simple, free from art,
Make me as a weaned child;
From distrust and envy free,
Pleased with all that pleases Thee.

Let us look unto Jesus! In Him we see the greatest meekness. It seems to be weak, and yet it is the greatest power.

The Holy Scripture also calls meekness an ornament. We read*) of the adornment of women: "But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price." Who would deny that you women, because destined for the adornment and beauty of the world, are therefore also called to the radiance of gentleness and meekness? But in reality there is here neither male nor female. Let also the picture of man be adorned with meekness, as was the appearance of the Son of Man, the greatest and holiest among men! Not peevishness, but meekness, humility, forbearance!

*) 1. Peter 3: 4.

These are the jewels for the crown of genuine beauty, the armor of holy strength in the battle of life.

Christian friends, adorn and strengthen yourselves with meekness! Now it is your duty to receive with meekness the Word of God, which again and again restores you, then again you should restore the brother who has been overtaken in a fault, in the spirit of meekness, as it is written. Now you must treat and serve the members of your own household with true gentleness and thoughtful love, then again, according to the Scripture, instruct in meekness those that oppose themselves, and like Jesus bring back the lost sheep. Now you should speak gentle words of comfort to the poor and suffering, then again you must yourself show great patience and meekness in your own sorrow. Whether you are desired or rebuffed by men, may you always be meek! Learn to speak with meekness, but also show your meekness often by being silent! How frequently has passionate rage moved you to evil words and deeds! Anger has the outward appearance of strength, but in reality it is weakness, an intoxication of the mind. The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God. Anger also deprives us of strength and wisdom. But meekness helps us to keep both.

I know, there are people with an excitable temper. Who can truthfully say that his life has always been free from such outbursts of his natural, irritable temper? But then we must so much the more restrain and subdue our temper in the power

of the Holy Spirit. Recently somebody said to me, "I can fly into a violent passion, but in an hour it is all over, then I am calm again." But even if the hailstorm of your violent passion is all over again in an hour, can it not in that hour entirely destroy many a fine plantation? What good does it do then that it is soon past? There is a great deal of rudeness in human nature, which has not yet been refined. Jesus wants meek disciples.

Now and then I have seen gentle old people. Mildness and gentleness like a lovely sunset, like a soft light and a quiet joy, shone forth from their looks and their words. They were different in their youth. Then they were more like the restless, fermenting new wine. But they became milder, like the old wine, which is better. They said themselves that through the experiences of their long life they had become more gentle. They had experienced that through meekness we become better and stronger and make more progress.

But are the meek not permitted to drive away their tormentors? Must they endure everything from the crooked and perverse world? May a gentle lamb not shake off the stinging flies that torment it? Did not Jesus ask that rude officer of the high-priest reproachfully, "Why smitest thou Me?" Did not Paul give his tormentors to understand that he was a Roman citizen? Jesus did not forbid our meekness to cast off the pinching shoes and oppressive fetters which impede us, whenever it can be done. It is not meekness that we un-

necessarily expose ourselves to the kicks of malice. But this is meekness, that we rather suffer the evil that befalls us, than that we revenge ourselves. This is meekness, that we even suffer for doing well, and being reviled, we bless. But away with all spurious meekness, with every friendly word which conceals quite another disposition! Away with the soft kiss of Judas, which covers up treachery and wickedness! Away also with the pleasant look of Eli that will not frown at the faults of those who have been entrusted to our training and guidance! This is real weakness, but not genuine, sanctified meekness. Only take care that Jesus speaks and is silent, bears and suffers, forgives and loves in you! This is meekness. Meekness seems to be weak and is yet a great power.

2.

It seems to retreat and yet it can conquer the earth. The meek shall inherit the earth, strictly speaking the land. I must call attention to the fact that in our text just these last words especially conform to the Old Testament. In Psalm 37*) we read: "But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace." By the earth Canaan is meant, that part of the earth which to the pious Jew was the substance of all promises and the best possession. There stood the temple, there was his joy. But

*) Verse 9 and especially verse 11.

the eye of Jesus traveled beyond the narrow borders of Canaan. The world, the whole earth is given to Him and is also promised to His meek disciples and servants.

What have men planned in darkness, how many crimes have they committed, how often have they gone to war in order to acquire a foot of ground, possessions and power, glory and authority! The tempter also asked Jesus to worship him; then he would lay at his feet the whole earth. But the Savior of mankind saw a better way.

Behold, how He takes possession of the kingdoms of the earth! With His meekness He has conquered the earth. In the purple of His blood He has entered upon universal dominion. So also the first servants of His kingdom, the disciples and apostles, strong heroes in labor and testimony, but going to the slaughter like gentle lambs. The blood of the martyrs became the seed of the Church. It was just this that subdued the hearts of men, that these disciples of Jesus were so calm, so gentle, altogether different from the world. Meekness seems to retreat and yet it can conquer the earth.

Perhaps you ask: According to this is not the kingdom of of God alone meant in our text? The Jew also associated with Canaan the idea of temporal possessions, of prosperity and peace. The same promise which is subjoined to this beatitude, is also added to the fourth commandment, and Paul*) wrote like Luther: "That it may be well with thee,

*) Ephesians 6: 3.

and thou mayest live long on the earth.” Is not here also the promise of *this* life given unto us? Do you not understand, that it is said of the meek that on account of their gentle disposition they will even on earth have prosperity, possessions and peace?

So many things would look brighter in this life, if we would put the mild oil of meekness upon the hard iron of reality, into the whole, great machinery of everyday-life. So many things would pass off more smoothly, if we would resign ourselves more calmly. If we would not always so readily allow a sharp tongue to do its evil work of destruction. That word has also been transferred from the Old to the New Testament: “For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil!”*) The gloom of resentment will not give way; we must enlighten it ourselves. Our meekness and kindness, however, will be the sunshine that does it. According to the well known fable, not the storm induced the traveler to take off his mantle; the gust of wind only induced him to wrap himself up tighter. But under the warm and friendly rays of the sun the man voluntarily took off his heavy cloak. Thus meekness will always accomplish more than anger.

Meekness knows how to conquer without waging war.**)

*) Psalm 34: 12—14; I. Peter 3: 10.

**) A saying of the Church father Basil the Great, who died 379.

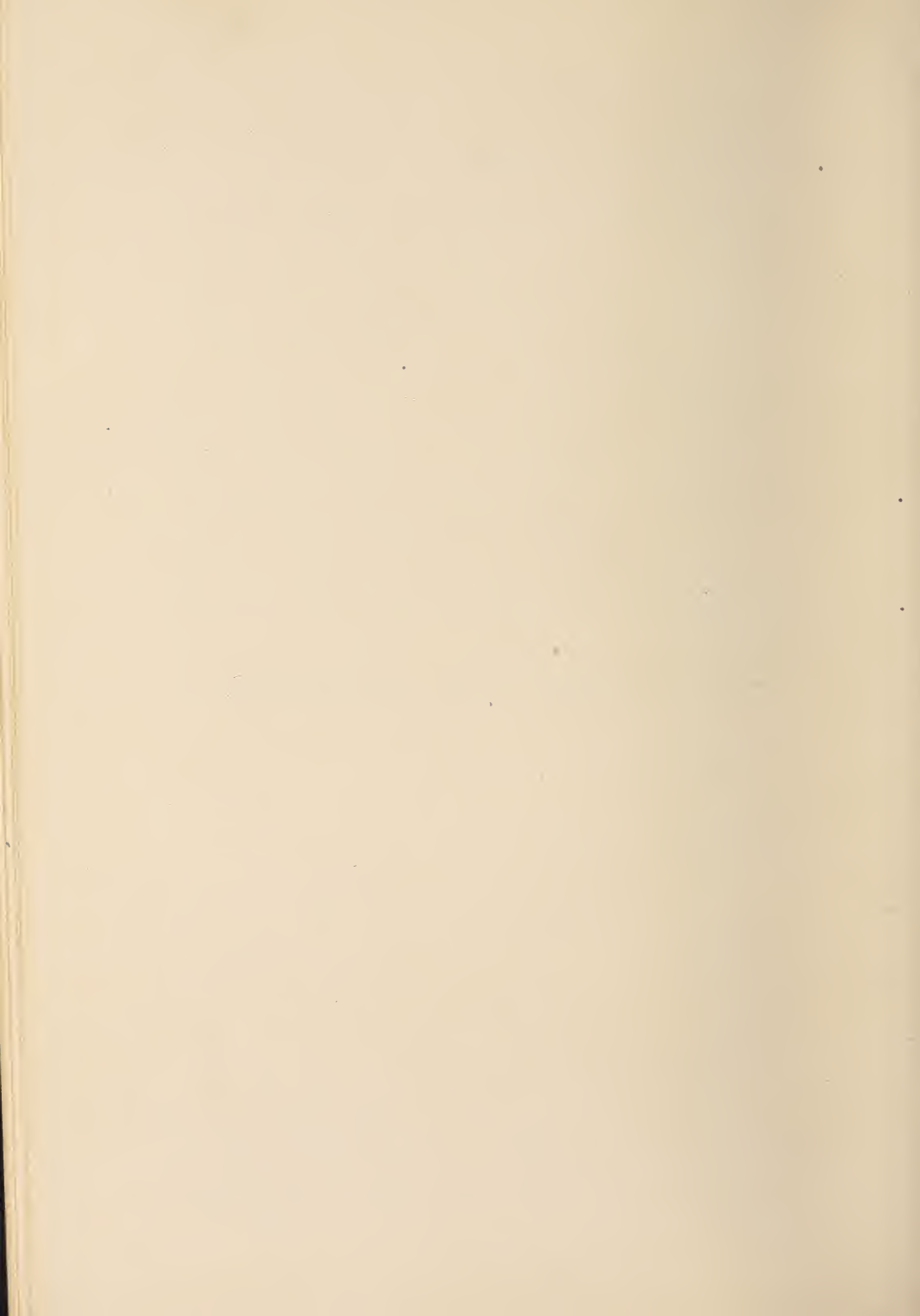
The soft, sweet strains of David's harp drove away Saul's evil spirit. All singers introduced gentle, mellow notes into their melodies. They know that the gentle also has its strength and power. Even wild animals are now being tamed by gentleness, not by brute force. Also in the manifold annoyances of daily life meekness and composure will be better than growling and quarreling. The stubborn oak may be shattered in the tempest, but the soft grass and reed knows how to bend, so that no storm can break it. He who is patient, is wise. Melanchthon often shed tears when he was insulted by ungrateful, hostile men, so that his little daughter often dried his tears with her apron; but he was silent when the world treated him with unkindness and always remained mild and meek. Life will be for no one a smooth and level road, so that it shall pass without any blows and disturbances. But meekness and composure will help us over many a difficulty, so that we may continue our journey through life with more ease and less trouble. Meekness seems to retreat and yet it will conquer the earth.

The meek shall inherit the earth. Israel thought of Canaan, to which they had journeyed many a time, for which they frequently had to battle. We have still another Land of Promise. You will think of the heavenly kingdom. But no! This beatitude only refers to the earth. Now sin still rules upon it, so that even the strong, holy virtue of meekness can not accomplish every thing and subdue completely the king-

doms of the earth. But we look for a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. When Canaan, the new Jerusalem, comes down from heaven, the earth will be renewed. Our eternal king will make all things new. Then the stains in the entire house of this world will be washed off and the earth will stand forth holy and in festive garb. Then the Prince of Peace will rule alone and the earth will be given to the meek servants of the eternal king as their inheritance and possession. This is the final aim of this saying. This interpretation is especially endorsed by the Lord with His "Blessed." Then the meek will possess the earth as the blessed. Christians, this is meekness, fully invested with its estate, great and holy in its power. This is that meekness, to which is promised the earth. Amen.

V.

HUNGER AND THIRST AFTER RIGHTEOUSNESS.



Matthew 5: 6.—Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.

Luke 6: 21, 25.—Blessed are ye that hunger now: for ye shall be filled. Woe unto you that are full! for ye shall hunger.

A celebrated philosopher*) once wrote: "If you want to better the people give them better food instead of declamations against sin!" As though every one were good, who has enough to eat! Once in a great meeting some one called out to me in the midst of my speech, "But suppose one has to suffer hunger!" The man who said it, however, did not look as though he had to suffer from hunger. Such catchwords are used nowadays to wield and sway the masses. To suffer from hunger—this is something of which many are afraid, and of which they have a good conception.

Jesus here also speaks of hungering, of thirsting, and of being filled. I wish they were all here who are so constantly talking about suffering hunger, whilst God is daily giving them to eat. (It is evident enough that they do not remember Him as much as He remembers them!) I also wish those thousands were here who believe that man shall live by bread alone. Jesus here speaks of a hunger which they do *not* have,

*) L. A. Feuerbach.

but which all ought to have. Ah, He also suffered physical hunger and thirst, He hungered in the dreary wilderness of temptation, He thirsted on the bloody cross of His sufferings. But here He speaks of soul hunger and soul thirst.

The words which Luke records from the Sermon on the Mount doubtless refer in part to bodily hunger, the fast-days of earthly poverty and privation. We are here reminded of the condition of many a poor child of sorrow, of many a Lazarus, who must satisfy himself with the crumbs that fall from the tables of others. But that, in these words, "being filled" is not to be understood merely externally, is evident from this, that a distinction is made between the life here and the satisfaction in the other world, where we will not eat earthly bread any more. I shall therefore speak of spiritual hunger and thirst, and the satisfaction of our inner life. Our main proposition will be :

HUNGER AND THIRST AFTER RIGHTEOUSNESS.

1. It must be felt by us.
2. It should stimulate us.
3. It helps us to be filled.

Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. Speak them to us also in the gracious hour of this holy day. With great longing and with a hungering heart we hasten to Thee from the desert of our poverty, our sin and

our cares, and direct our holiest desires to Thee, for the world cannot satisfy us nor give us peace.

O fountain, life bestowing,
From out the Savior's heart,
A fountain purely flowing,
A fount of love Thou art!
O let us, freely tasting,
Our burning thirst assuage!
Thy sweetness never wasting,
Avails from age to age.

Him that cometh to Thee, Thou wilt in no wise cast out, but wilt accept and fill him with mercy and righteousness. Awaken within us a true inward hunger and thirst after righteousness, and then grant that we may be filled by Thee. Amen.

1.

Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness. Must hunger and thirst not be felt by us? Is hunger not painful? The desire for life and the desire for nourishment are inseparably connected. They demand gratification. Even the cry of the infant is occasioned by hunger and thirst. If such an urgent need is not satisfied, it becomes painful. Jesus employs this simile to express a strong, ardent longing which makes itself felt and gives us pain. We use the same comparison when we speak of a *thirst* for knowledge, or revenge.

There is in human nature a longing and thirsting. The unregenerate man, who is ignorant of spiritual life, believes that worldly pleasure and sensual delight are the food that can satisfy the soul. But the craving after enjoyment is not satisfied by enjoyments. Avarice is not satisfied with money. And of honor and the thirst for honor we must say the same thing. The poet says, "From craving to enjoyment thus I reel, and in enjoyment languish for desire." A Persian king, who, with all his enjoyments was not satisfied, caused inquiries to be made throughout his whole kingdom, whether some one knew of a fresh delight. Immortal soul, canst thou thus be satisfied? Even Solomon, the king and preacher, had a better knowledge. He writes that he gathered silver and gold, procured men singers and women singers, and the delights of the sons of men, and whatsoever his eyes desired he kept not from them, he withheld not his heart from any joy. But he adds from his own experience, having looked at these things from the right point of view, "And behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun." Many have possessed and enjoyed much, but after all it was nothing.

In order to find this out one need not, as many think, wait till the prime of life is past. Some time ago a young man, a student at the university of Leipzig, stood before me, his eyes filled with tears, his heart empty, burned out by lust and sin. He had begun to feel again hunger after righteous-

ness, hunger for the bread of the father's house. Hungering soul, you can be nourished, if you feel *this* hunger! It must be felt by us.

Even all the treasures of our civilization cannot give satisfaction to the inmost heart,—science nor art, nor labor, nor a good reputation, nor anything whatsoever. The things of this world have been so created by God that they should not satisfy us. It were a pity if they could! We would then no more feel any hunger and thirst after that which is higher.

In the life of men who know and desire nothing higher, worldly pleasures and weariness of life alternate with each other, but weariness of the world will be the dregs in the cup of life. Many know this very well, but this knowledge does not lead them to that earnest longing after righteousness, which Jesus calls blessed. True, now and then they affect a supercilious, sometimes sportive contempt of the world. But they are merely surfeited with its pleasures, a fashionable disease in this age.

It sometimes happens that a sick man no longer has any feeling of hunger. Then means must be employed to produce appetite again. Our Lord does not cut down the tree at once, but will dig about it and cultivate it. He wants us to grow up into the maturity of righteousness, but He cares for fallen man, just as one cares for and nourishes a weak child. If they only would once more hunger and thirst after that one thing, after that which can really satisfy: Righteousness.

There are people who in all their life have never felt real hunger and thirst, but there are still more who never have felt a real hunger and thirst after righteousness. A well known preacher of the Middle Ages (John Tauler) insisted that a man must be emptied and freed from everything if he would hear the voice of the Great Teacher. This is true soul-fasting, this is the lonely desert way through the world, where we find manna and where the rocks are opened, that we may quench our thirst. The springs of life flow from the heavenly mountains. But first, iniquity burns in the soul: sincere repentance first works within us: first there comes upon us the knowledge: "My sin!" "No man living is justified!" This is hunger and thirst after righteousness. It must be felt by us.

2.

It should stimulate us. Is hunger and thirst not a mighty impulse? Has it not a great power? Hunger drives man in the sweat of his face to cultivate the ground. Hunger has defeated the most valiant armies, surrendered strongholds and made peace between enemies. Hunger compelled David to break the law and to eat the hallowed bread in his flight. It impelled the disciples to pluck the ears of corn on the Sabbath. Have you never read of travelers who languishing sought a spring? All creatures run after food and drink, and they must work and serve for it. God did not release man from the necessity of laboring for his food. Just so it is in the spiritual world.

Jesus said, "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me" (John 4: 34). Should this not also be our meat and our enjoyment? Jesus also said, "Labor for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life!" *Labor* for it! There are many interpreters (and Luther is among them), who by the righteousness mentioned in this passage of the Sermon on the Mount understand only the righteousness of a holy life. Righteousness in this sense is not abolished in the New Testament nor in the Evangelical Church, though the Catholics have always charged that according to our doctrine good works are useless. The whole Sermon on the Mount tells us the contrary. Seek ye the kingdom of God and His righteousness also by leading a holy life! This righteousness of good works is not merely an outward respectability and the so-called civil righteousness, which after all is only a side-street of the broad way, but it means Christian righteousness. Thus our inward hunger and thirst should lead us to the righteousness of a Christian life.

But let us investigate more thoroughly the doctrines and sentiments of the Holy Scriptures. Will the righteousness of good works suffice, will it give us perfect satisfaction and contentment? If Jesus represented righteousness as a food that would appease our hunger, He certainly meant that we must *receive* it. Food, after all, is not made by man. God must give it, however zealous man may be in sowing, plowing and reaping. Spiritual hunger and thirst must drive us to the

Lord of goodness and righteousness. Do you not hear from the midst of His children the voices of fervent longing, the cry of a burning desire after Him? "My soul thirsteth for God!" "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after Thee, o God!" O human heart, with all your longing you must die of hunger and thirst, if your hunger does not drive you to the door of grace. But the cloud of blessing will not fail to pour the refreshing showers upon the parched ground of the heart, especially if an Elijah prays for them! Hunger and thirst after righteousness prompts us to prayer.

His word the Lord also calls a food. When the tempter demanded that Jesus transform the stones of the wilderness into bread, the Lord said that man must live also by the word of God. May the gracious Lord grant that a time may come again such as the prophet Amos (chapter 8, v. 11) predicted, a time when God will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, but of hearing the Words of the Lord. What is the Church to many at the present time? A place of refuge to which they do not go. And your Bible at home, which you do not open, your devotional books, which you do not use—what are they but bread which you do not eat? Formerly great multitudes came when a servant of God distributed the bread of life. They did not think it unpalatable, as did the people of Capernaum, who said, "This is an hard saying: who can hear it?" Hunger will also induce us to eat hard pieces and crusts

of bread. Hunger and thirst after righteousness will drive us to the Word of the Lord.

And what shall I say of the holy food of the Lord's table? Did not the poet sing with devout Christian feeling:

Ah, how hungers all my spirit
For the love I do not merit!
Oft have I, with sighs fast thronging,
Thought upon this food with longing,
In the battle well nigh worsted,
For this cup of life have thirsted,
For the Friend who here invites us,
And to God Himself unites us!

I ask you, Do you still think, implore, weep and sing with such a profound spiritual hunger? In the Lord you would find righteousness and strength, the righteousness of God. Hunger and thirst, eating and drinking, is here no longer an allegory; in the Lord's Supper it is reality! But woe unto you that are full, full of self-righteousness and pharisaical pride! Hunger and thirst after righteousness drives us to the sacrament. It should stimulate us.

3.

It helps us to be filled. Jesus calls blessed those that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for this very reason, that they shall be filled. How could He otherwise call blessed those that hunger? Because they come to Him, they are satis-

fied, they are comforted with righteousness. He who of God is made unto us righteousness, called out into the world, "He that cometh to Me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on Me shall never thirst." Ah, here is a host without an equal, who came that we might have life, and have it more abundantly. He that cometh to Me!—Without Him we are as sheep going astray, hungering, thirsting, for we are without a shepherd. He that believeth on Me!—Human soul, do you know what that means? Intimate acquaintance, close fellowship with your richest and most blessed friend. Many nowadays act as though we could be justified and saved by doubt. But your doubt will make you destitute. It is Christian faith alone that can make you satisfied, blessed and righteous. Your heartfelt longing, your inward hunger will help you to this end. But your Lord and Shepherd is greater than your heart, your wretched, hungering heart.

There is no one who does not stand in need of His grace and righteousness for his inward satisfaction. There is here no difference: All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God! All are blessed and righteous through Him! A great teacher of the Church*) has said: "Not to sin is the righteousness of God, but the righteousness of man is God's forgiveness."

Beggars and kings eat the same bread of the earth. They

*) St. Bernard of Clairvaux.

must also eat the same bread from heaven, that which gives us true life and satisfies all who eat. If those that were bidden will not come to the great supper, yet will He find such as will come, and they shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of His house.

Plenteous grace with Thee is found,
Grace to cover all my sin;
Let the healing streams abound:
Make and keep me pure within.
Thou of life the Fountain art,
Freely let me take of Thee:
Spring Thou up within my heart,
Rise to all eternity.

One more question: Have we no longer this sense of hunger and thirst? Has it failed? Then remember, that as in this life our hunger and thirst shall never be satisfied to a degree that we shall not need to eat and drink again, so it is true of our spiritual need and its satisfaction. We must come again and again, to eat, drink and be filled. The fountain of salvation and knowledge is being continually pointed out to you, especially on every Lord's day. The Bread of Life is here constantly being offered to you. Will you not soon partake of it again? Why do you so long remain away from the Lord's table? I beseech you to come. And when you come, it should be with the feeling that you are going to a feast, to a royal entertainment. It is to such a feast that you go. Sometimes

the rich, the satisfied or the sick actually envy the appetite of a poor man. Let us be these poor, hungry souls, who are envied by those that are full and satisfied—envied often even here on earth!

“I will give you rest!” says the Lord to His own. You shall have all you want at His table. Neither shall you thirst in the burning fever of your last hour. The beautiful, precious words of the psalmist (Psalm 137: 15) apply to the beginning of the life beyond: “As for me, I will behold Thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with Thy likeness!” Then we shall be perfectly blessed. There will be no longer any hunger and thirst! The book of Revelation says of the saints in heaven, “They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more.” (Rev. 7: 16.) They are forever blessed, for they are satisfied. But for the life that now is, the saying holds good till the end of time: “Blessed are ye that hunger now! Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness.” Amen.

VI.

DIVINE AND HUMAN MERCY.

Matthew 5: 7.—Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.

Luke 6: 36.—Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful.

In the passages of Holy Scripture which I have read, two things are pointed out to us: divine and human mercy. In all the Holy Scriptures nothing is mentioned so frequently as the fact that God is merciful. Mercy is the incessant pulsation of the eternal heart of God our Father. Without divine mercy we could not live. Without divine mercy there would be no blessedness. We read (Titus 3: 5): “According to His mercy He saved us.” The Scripture speaks of redemption, when we read (Luke 1: 78): “Through the tender mercy of our God, whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us.” It is well known that a Sunday of the Church-year bears the name *Misericordias Domini*, which means, The mercy of the Lord. It is the second Sunday after Easter, on which the precious gospel lesson of the Good Shepherd is read.

But this great, divine mercy must waken human mercy. If the whole Christian religion has been called an imitation of divine nature,*) then human mercy must also constantly imitate divine mercy. The light of this earth, every color,

*) By Gregory Nazianzen.

all the radiance of this world is a reflection of the heavenly sunlight. It is just so with the mercy which is in heaven and that which is on earth. Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful!

Here begins a new division in the beatitudes. After the mourning, the hunger and the thirst we have enjoyed the infinite lovingkindness of our God and Savior and have been filled. Should we then not sympathize with those who still hunger, outwardly and inwardly? In the first beatitude Jesus spoke of manifold poverty. Here we could speak of riches. He who is merciful is rich, rich in love, inclined to help others, benevolent, generous. He always has something to give, and if it be only a mite. Merciful is he whose heart is with the poor. Take mercy away from humanity and you tear out the heart thereof.

To the exhortation there is here also added a promise. The exhortation is, Be merciful! The promise is, Blessed!—for you shall obtain mercy. Thus we read of a twofold mercy, human and divine, the duty of the Christian and the gift of God. But the two cannot be separated. Let us consider:

DIVINE AND HUMAN MERCY.

1. The mercy which we must practice—it is our duty.
2. The mercy which we shall obtain—it is our joy.

Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, we praise

Thee for Thy unfailing mercies. In love Thou hast delivered us, Thou hast not dealt with us after our sins, and lovest us as a Father.

Jesus! Name of wondrous love!

Human name of Him above!

Pleading only this, we flee,

Helpless, O our God, to Thee.

We are not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which Thou hast showed unto us. And now we present again our supplications before Thee at Thy eternal throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace: Accept us according to Thy lovingkindness. And then help us by Thy Word and Thy Spirit, that we may follow Thee as beloved children and serve Thee better through works of holy mercy. Let Thy love be mighty in us, so that we may have a blessed boldness in the day of judgment and may not perish before Thee when Thou wilt come again. To this end bless also to-day Thy precious Word. Amen.

1.

Even in the Old Testament the duty of mercy was enjoined upon the Jews. That Old Testament hunger and thirst after righteousness which was represented by fasting was to develop into mercy. Thus the true fast is described by the prophet:*) “Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and

*) Read Isaiah 58: 5—7.

that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house?" The Scribes and Pharisees had also failed to keep this in view. Jesus therefore often rebuked them because they neglected mercy, for a pretence making long prayers while they devoured widows' houses. Compared with such saints heathen are often better people. The Roman Emperor Titus was a heathen, but he considered every day lost in which he did not do good to some one. I often think, if only many a Christian were like him! I ask you here, whether any of you live according to the maxim of this heathen. It was also a semi-pagan Samaritan who took pity on the man that had been wounded and left half dead on the highway between Jerusalem and Jericho, but he was better than the priest and the Levite, who were Jews and served in the temple.

The human heart is not without profound, natural impulses and a compassionate disposition. We would not scorn this natural human pity. In this connection we say, "Nothing that is human is foreign to me." But will these human impulses always suffice? Divine mercy must be the impulse, strength and pattern of human mercy. On the whole the ancient pagan world knew little of mercy. The modern world also knows little of it, where there is no faith in the merciful God and Savior.

Of Jesus we read that He was moved with compassion on the multitudes, and that He went about everywhere doing good. The first Christians were full of love and mercy. The

sick and the destitute were called the jewels and the treasures of the Church. Of what use is all preaching, if words are not followed by deeds? Actions speak louder than words. Dr. John Hess, the reformer of Silesia who was pastor at Breslau, refused to preach unless the council of the city would provide for the poor who were lying on the streets and before the church. He said, "My dear Lord Jesus is lying at the door; I cannot step over Him." A true Christian will always think when he sees one who is destitute, What if I were so wretched and needy! No, even more; he thinks, My dear Lord Jesus is destitute, I cannot leave Him in this condition.

The faith was obscured in the Middle Ages, but mercy was practiced in the convents and asylums. They had their rules of mercy, and enumerated seven works of charity:*) To feed the hungry, to give drink to the thirsty, to take in strangers, to clothe the naked, to visit the sick, to visit those in prison and to bury the dead. The Church enjoined this upon all her members by word and example. This spirit will always remain in the Church as long as she is a Christian Church. These seven works of charity were glorified in picture by the art of painting. This is the mercy which we must practice—it is our duty.

Mercy is first of all a feeling, a profound, heartfelt sentiment. But should the heart be without hands? It is true, to weep with them that weep is also mercy. To lift up a poor,

*) After Matthew 25: 35, 36.

broken heart with comforting words is also mercy. To pray for the sick is also mercy. The Church of the Middle Ages did not enumerate seven works of mercy with respect only to physical distress, but just as many with regard to spiritual need. Among them was consolation, petition, forgiveness. We must not have such a superficial conception of mercy as to think always only of physical need.

The mercy of God did not end in emotions and words. Christianity is a great *deed* of mercy in Christ. Deed and word were never separated. It should also be so with us. Our text says, Merciful like God! How this sounds! What an infinite, heavenly task it is for our love and our conduct! Divine and human mercy ought to correspond more and more.

“Blessed are the merciful.” Do you not often see that sentence written on institutions of mercy, in churches, on alms-boxes? The Church of Christ ought to have the exhortation to mercy always before her eyes, so that the river of love may flow through the Church continually and more abundantly.

In the Greek language, in which the New Testament was written, the word alms is synonymous with mercy. What you give when a collection is taken, or what you otherwise give, should be not your money, but your mercy. There was more mercy in the widow's mite than in all the gold-coins of the wealthy. If, however, not only poor widows, but the well to do and even the wealthy give but the farthings—is there any mercy in such giving? Many a one must be fairly

squeezed, before he will give anything, just as we twist and squeeze a wet rag. Is this the mercy that God demands? Soft hands and a stony heart? The hand becomes soft if it does not do anything, but the heart becomes hard by doing nothing. Sometimes I am afraid to ask a man to give, for I think he may not do it willingly, there may be no love, no mercy in the gift. But then again I say to myself, No, I must ask him, nevertheless. For otherwise he would be justified in saying, No one has called my attention to the need. No man hath hired me. Here it must also hold good,—“So that they are without excuse!” Many excuses are heard. Many say, “Too many requests are made,” but I say that the misery exceeds our requests. Many also think, “The misery is too great. What can I do, who myself do not possess much?” The answer is, Better do something, even if it be little, than nothing at all.

People invite and urge us to mercy, they arrange concerts, fairs and balls in the holy name of charity. Is this the mercy that God demands? No, mercy *itself* ought to be to us a delight and a duty. It is selfishness, and not mercy, to do a good work with a view to the honor of one's own person, one's name or one's party. It is not real, genuine mercy when Catholic Sisters of Mercy go to the sick, but avail themselves of the opportunity to lure Protestants into their Church, which claims to be the sole depository of salvation. But let us all examine our alms and our so-called good gifts and deeds to

see whether they are prompted by real mercy. Let us remove all unholy fire from the altar of mercy! Otherwise we have our reward. There are also some people who with contributions and charitable gifts would release themselves from the duty of love itself. Is this the mercy that God demands?

But he who marks from day to day
In gen'rous acts his radiant way,
Treads the same path the Savior trod,
The path to glory and to God.

To be merciful does not simply mean to be open-handed. To be merciful means more. Luther is right when he says, "Giving is a fruit of love, but not love itself." I am led here to think of a man who was asked for a gift by one in distress, but who had no money with him, and in this predicament gave him nothing but—a pressure of the hand! Was this no mercy? The Lord looketh on the heart. More heart, more individuality, more mercy in everything! We have homes for the poor and the orphans, hospitals, charitable associations, deaconesses, etc. Thanks be to God that we have all this! But notwithstanding all this there may be one thing lost sight of in the outward bustle, that which must be the heart and soul of everything: Mercy, which we must practice—*it* is our duty.

One more excuse: "People do not deserve it." It is true, there are some people that are abominable. We ask ourselves, Should we reward vice and laziness? Often people come to my

door handing me a paper, on which I read, "Dismissed from prison." What! is this to be your recommendation? Not simply a beggar, but a thief, one dismissed from prison? Christ demanded that we should go to those in prison, and now the prisoner comes to my door. Shall I repulse him? Charity shall cover the multitude of sins. Perhaps he will go out into the world, and from a beggar become a thief again, if he finds no mercy. Does anybody repel one who has been shipwrecked, saying to him: It was your own fault that your ship was lost?

He does not deserve any mercy, no!—But did we deserve divine mercy? Have you not often praised that divine mercy which we have received, although we are sinners? He to whom much is forgiven, loveth much, like the woman at the feet of Jesus. Think of the many suicides of the present day. Many a one hath chosen death because he found no more mercy and love in this world and no longer believed in it. Such an one was certainly much to blame. But were those not to blame at all who took no pity on him? There is a great gulf to-day also, which yawns between the classes of society, between the poor and the rich, employer and employee, and it will not be closed except we all become true Christians and in genuine mercy think of every man, He is my brother! Thus Jesus was touched with the feeling of our infirmities! Thus let your moderation be known unto *all* men.

Only to men? Has not the poor animal also a claim upon

our mercy? Recently I rode in a carriage whose driver beat his horse continually. Although in my clerical robe, I was obliged to speak to him a few words through the window—also a sermon on mercy. “A righteous man regardeth the life of his beast!” Be merciful towards your animals, just as your Father in heaven is merciful towards you! All this is mercy which we must practice—it is our duty.

2.

The mercy which we shall obtain—it is our joy. For this reason the merciful are called blessed, because they will obtain mercy, divine mercy. When it is written that God is well pleased with the sacrifices of mercy, this is a joy which He grants to the merciful even here on earth. Ask our deaconesses, whether in their arduous labors of mercy they do not have a quiet joy and seasons of blessed experience. They wear a somber, black dress, but beneath it there is a cheerful, Christian heart. They would not exchange this for many joys of the world. But you need not be a deaconess to feel this. A dear Christian once said to me, “In what a cheerful mood I went to bed that day!” He had done a deed of mercy on that day. James says: “That man shall be blessed in his deed!” You might also very often go to bed in a cheerful mood, if you only would go and do likewise! The Scripture speaks of still another bed. It says that the Lord will strengthen the merciful upon the bed of languishing.*) But there is still

*) Psalm 41: 1—4.

another bed, upon which the merciful will lie more peacefully and blessed than the unmerciful. It is the dying-bed. May you soon obtain the joy, the great blessing and mercy of being merciful!

He who soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly. The emotions, thoughts, words and gifts of your mercy are seed sown into the furrows of the earth, from which you will reap in heavenly garner. What shall we reap and obtain? We read, Mercy, divine mercy. As divine mercy must become human mercy within us, so there will result from human mercy the greatest divine mercy in the life beyond—this is our joy. Did the destitute here on earth not rejoice in the mercy which you bestowed upon them? You will rejoice a thousand times more in the mercy which the all-merciful God will bestow upon you in the future life. It is not merited, for it is mercy which we shall obtain. Mercy is unmerited. This “obtaining” the Scripture calls in other places inheriting. Inheriting is not earning or deserving.

You can however not spare yourself the sowing of human mercy if you would obtain divine mercy. Your mercy must call forth the mercy of God. But on the other hand your unmercifulness will also provoke the retribution of your Judge. My friend, what will become of you then, if you have shown no mercy. James writes: “For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy!” And has not Jesus shown us plainly the eternal judgment, when He will speak

to the merciful? “I was an hungered, thirsty, naked, sick, and you have visited, fed and clothed me?” To be sure, the merciful, the blessed will hear nothing of their good deeds. Lord, when saw we Thee thus? It is well known that the Roman Catholic Church teaches the meritoriousness of good works. But are we to practice mercy in order to merit something? It is just this which makes mercy so pure, so glorious and so great, that it does not serve for a reward, not even an eternal reward. Its rejoicing will be like that of a child that has been surprised with beautiful, unexpected presents—blessed! This is the mercy which we shall obtain—it is our joy.

Dear Christian friends! Human and divine mercy, duty and joy—none without the other. This can give value to our life, duty and joy, the service and reception of love and mercy. Men are asking for true joy. They should just as much ask for their duty, without which there is no joy. They believe that joy results from the gratification of our desires, but true joy springs from the discharge of our duties. It is so with mercy. This is the greatest duty and the most blessed joy. Let us practice mercy! Then we will obtain it! Amen.

VII.

THE PURE HEART, WHICH SEES GOD.

Matthew 5: 8.—Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.

We ought to pray for a pure heart every day. For this reason we find this petition so frequently in our psalms, prayers and hymns. Nothing is so necessary as a pure heart. Jesus in the previous beatitudes speaks of certain aspects of the heart, as for instance in the beatitude immediately preceding our text He speaks of the heart's compassion, namely mercy. Here however He means the whole heart.

Since our last discourse a dear Christian woman wrote to me, "With longing I look forward to the next sermon." It is her opinion that this sermon about the pure heart must be a difficult sermon. In this she is right. She continues in her letter, "For where is there one who is pure?" Ah, I feel that he who would preach in the right manner about the pure heart, must have a pure heart himself. Jesus could preach about it, but not we. I can well understand how Origen, that unimpeachable, noble Christian, that grand old teacher of the Church, could close the sacred volume with the words, "I cannot preach." His eye had been caught by the following sentence from Psalm 50: "What hast thou to do to declare My statutes, or that thou shouldest take My covenant in thy mouth, seeing thou hatest instruction, and castest My words

behind thee?" The great prophet Isaiah also exclaimed, "I am a man of unclean lips;" and Job complained, "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?"*) Should I then omit this beatitude? Nay, may it preach repentance to the preacher also!

Many a one at the time of his confirmation has chosen this text as the maxim of his Christian life, as the standard by which he should always measure and examine himself. I wish I could remind all the young people of it. On tombstones also I have read this sentence. It certainly refers also to the departed who behold God with a pure heart. But Jesus said it for the living. Its significance, its instruction, admonition, exhortation and promise apply to the old and the young.

Men are prone to speak of their good hearts, but the Scripture informs us that the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth. Jesus said (Matthew 15: 19, 20): "For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: these are the things which defile a man." The heart is the soil from which springs the whole life of man, the good and the evil. The celebrated Voltaire once offered his heart to some one and received the reply: "For shame! You would give me the worst you have." But the heart of our inmost life is also the seat of the best we have. Therefore Jesus has called blessed the pure heart, and has held it up as a precious treasure and a

*) Isaiah 6: 5; Job 14: 4.

high ideal. The clearest sight is ascribed to the pure heart: it can look into heaven, it sees God.

THE PURE HEART WHICH SEES GOD.

Two different things are here indicated:

1. Many a holy task in life.
2. Many a blessed revelation of God.

O Lord, Thou hast searched us, and known us. Thou knowest that we stand in the dust of the earth and have an impure heart. Cast us not away from Thy presence. Grant unto us through Thy word of truth open eyes of simplicity and knowledge, so that we may not remain in self-delusion. Help us through Thy Spirit, that we may heartily repent of every sin and that the pure heart may appear to us exceedingly important, necessary, glorious and blessed. Do Thou create in us a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within us. Help us that every morning we may put on the bright garment of purity, and if we soil it, do Thou wash off the stains. Daily strengthen within us the new man, who is always mindful of Thee. Unto Thee we give our heart, that Thou mayest sanctify it wholly. Take my heart, it is Thine own, it shall be Thy royal throne. Amen.

1.

Blessed are the pure in heart. The Word of God does not merely reveal to us in many passages the impurity of the human heart, but it also demands that we constantly meditate

upon the purification of our heart, that we pray for it and strive after it. This will be our greatest and holiest task in life until the hour of death. The Jews also taught and spoke much about purification. They had manifold laws of purification. Certain physical conditions rendered men unclean. He who entered the house of a Gentile, or who touched a corpse, was considered unclean. The Pharisees considered it a holy service of God to observe scrupulously the outward rules of purification. They had clean vessels and washed their hands when they ate bread, but they did not think of the true, divine service of the pure heart. Jesus often raised His warning voice against this. His woe against the Pharisees and the Scribes (Matthew 23: 25, 26) is the very reverse of this beatitude. How often does God also point out in the Old Testament that He looketh on the heart, and express the demand, Give Me thine heart! How often do we here also find expressions treating of *another* heart, or of a *new* heart, or of *one* heart, or of a heart *to know God*!*) What else is meant by all these expressions but a pure heart? It was always easier to pay attention to outward ceremonies and observances, than to better the heart, to change its inmost feelings and purpose, its belief and its principles. Jesus said to His opponents (Matthew 23: 28), "Outwardly ye appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity." Blessed are the pure in heart!

*) Compare 1. Samuel 10: 9; Ezekiel 36: 26; 11: 9; Jeremiah 24: 7.

The Roman Church also has frequently tried to find purity of heart and life in external institutions. But the pure heart and life is not acquired by separating oneself from the world as a monk. There may be great danger in contact with and the temptation of the world, but one can also be sick without contagion. Impurity is within us and will go with us also into solitude. Is it not more valiant to overcome danger than to avoid it? The Roman Church considered the secular life in general as profane and impure. The Holy Scripture reproves expressly the monkish error of those who forbid to marry, and informs us that every creature of God is good (1. Timothy 4: 3, 4). Luther in his explanation of this saying of the Sermon on the Mount says of the Catholic view, "As though God did not have a pure heart, when He created both man and woman! How should such work and thought create an impure heart?" Here the word will rather hold good that unto the pure all things are pure. The Countess Elizabeth of Thuringia, who is called a saint, owing to such a false Roman view could even pray that God might take from her heart even her love for her children. Acting upon the advice of her terrible confessor, she wished to make her heart purer and holier through the extinction of all earthly love.

But is there no purifying agent for our impure heart? In the first place I would mention repentance. And here I would say, You ought to confess your sins more frequently and show a more penitent spirit than you generally do. Jesus, like His

forerunner John, demanded first of all repentance. And we should not merely repent because of obvious transgressions, of sins in word and deed, but repentance rather has reference to the heart, the impure heart. It is a matter of ideas and feelings, inclination and endeavors, opinions and purposes. There should be no guile, no envy, no unchastity in the heart. For our love also we need a purer heart. Paul names as the sum total of the commandments: charity out of a *pure heart* (1. Timothy 1: 5), and Peter writes, "Love one another with a *pure heart* fervently!" (1. Peter 1: 22.) Young Timothy is exhorted to "flee youthful lusts." These are holy tasks in life which the Lord points out to us.

I know very well that in this age of impurity it is especially difficult to keep the heart pure. At the present time more than ever before numerous publications are issued that are soiled with the filth of vice. Art forgets more and more its high vocation of representing the good, the true and the beautiful, especially the good. It is becoming demoralized. Weeds also often have flowers. The marsh may be covered with greensward, but he who steps upon it will come to grief. Such phenomena of the age ought to stimulate us to be more zealous in guarding the heart. A great theologian of the Middle Ages (Bernard of Clairvaux) calls *chastity in youth* a martyr's crown without blood. Many say, we should let the young people sow their wild oats. This is a foolish counsel and a bad principle. One cannot wash himself clean in mud. The pas-

sions cannot be suppressed by giving oneself up to sin. You young people must pray a great deal more for a pure heart.

We must also let the Word of God operate upon us for the purpose of purifying our heart. Jesus said to His disciples, "Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you." He says that His Father purgeth every branch of the true vine that beareth fruit. We ourselves will become purer by loyalty to Him who is absolutely holy and pure. Luther remarks on this, "When through the preaching of the gospel we come to believe, we become pious and begin to be pure." To this he adds, "As long as we are in the flesh, we can never be perfectly pure." Therefore we must be cleansed and washed again and again by the hands of eternal love, just as a child by his mother. The faithful Lord, who washed the feet of His disciples before the Holy Supper, still gives unto us every Sunday His absolution. It is written, "He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." But on the other hand we read of him who hopes in the Lord: "He purifieth himself, even as He (God) is pure" (1. John 3: 3). The Christian himself must help in order to become pure.

The Christian life is not merely a coming, confessing, receiving forgiveness, singing, praying and thanksgiving. The Christian life is also a deed, a labor, a battle, a conquest of self, a cutting off of the hand, a plucking out of the eye that offends us. James exhorts, "Cleanse your hands, ye sinners;

and purify your hearts, ye double minded!" In order to do this we need not run away from the world, but rather to fight in the world; then we will not be of the world. Samson did not lose his divine strength in the land of the Philistines, but by impure love. Sin always lieth at the door of our heart and unto us is his desire, but we should rule over him. The pure heart is also a prudent heart, a strong heart, a courageous heart. The Lord will increase the supply of His strength in the holy battle which we fight against sin. This is the poet's hope, desire and purpose:

Purge me from the guilt, that lies
Wrapt within my heart's disguise;
Let me thence, by Thee renewed,
Each presumtuous sin exclude.

The word concerning purity of heart shows us many a holy task in life.

2.

It also calls our attention to many a blessed revelation of God. The pure in heart are called blessed because they shall *see God*. See God! One must ask, How, When, and Where? God is a Spirit. With carnal eyes we cannot see Him. Is it not written, "No man hath seen God at any time?" (John 1: 18.) And is it not said of God, "Whom no man hath seen, nor can see?" (1. Timothy 6: 16.)

Paul once said that the invisible things of God, His eternal power and godhead, are clearly seen, being understood

by the things that are made. (Romans 1: 20.) To be sure, impure hearts and eyes (we need only read that which follows the passage mentioned above) will see even in the works of creation nothing but world, flesh, lust and dust. Many people have seen much, except that which is greatest, namely, God. But to perceive the existence of the Creator is not yet that revelation of God, that blessed vision, which Jesus means.

Philip, the disciple, once asked, "Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us!" "Philip, he that hath seen Me hath seen the Father!" Upon another occasion Jesus said to His disciples, "Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see!" Where the Pharisees saw nothing, ingenuous disciples beheld the brightness and glory of the Lord. The greatest revelations were always granted to devout and purified hearts. Jesus, the pure image of God, hath shined in these hearts. The veil of Moses is now taken away; the holy of holies is opened. This is a blessed revelation of God, this is to *see God*.

The impure heart flees from God, who is the holy judge of the heart and the avenger of sin. Therefore it does not see God, because it avoids Him. But where there is a pure heart, there is formed the image of God, who is eternal purity. This is the bright mirror in which we see God. Augustine, the great teacher of the Church, did not see God in his years under paganism and with his impure, profligate heart, and had no faith. But after he had read and considered what is

written in Romans 13: 13, "Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying!"—in short, when his heart became purer, he began to see God. Jesus said, "If any man will do His will!" (John 7: 17.)

The pure heart would also teach us to understand better the dark ways of God. There is an intimation of this even in the Old Testament: "Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart!" As in antiquity it was a great favor for the chosen ones to see always the face of the king, so purified hearts meet constantly the gracious eye of their eternal Lord and behold the essence of His love. Paul writes (2. Timothy 2: 22) that we must call on the Lord out of a *pure heart*. Ah, as often as it is offered, what is such a prayer, the prayer of a sanctified, pure heart, but a clear vision, a great divine revelation, a blessed contemplation of God?

Blessed before Him! The poet Torquato Tasso gave a beautiful explanation of this passage of Scripture. When he was asked who is most happy, he answered, "God;" and upon the question, "Who besides and after God?" he replied: "He who is most like God." Jesus calls blessed the pure in heart, because they are most like the pure, blessed God. We sing:

Blest are the pure in heart,
For they shall see our God;
The secret of the Lord is theirs,
Their soul is Christ's abode.

But God does not dwell with them only here on earth. They will dwell with Him forever, in His house, in the Father's eternal house of many mansions. Then will follow the blessed revelation: *Seeing God*. Here on earth the eyes of our spirit are always dim. Why? Because there are still so many carnal desires in our heart. Because our heart is not yet perfectly pure. If we would perfectly see Him, we must be like Him—spirit. Therefore John could write those words so full of meaning, "We shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is." (1. John 3: 2.) We must first have put on the spiritual, the resurrection body. Thus Paul could long to be delivered from the body of this death. Then will we have the pure heart which sees God.

Dear Christian friends! May you then follow holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord! Think often of the city where you are to dwell forever. There shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth. Nothing that is impure can enter through those gates nor walk on those streets. He who would behold the palace of the king, must be clothed in white garments. The last page of the Bible further tells us that the servants of God shall serve Him, and they shall see His face; and His name shall be in their foreheads. Then the prayer and longing of the psalmist will be entirely fulfilled: "When shall I come and appear before God?" "Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? or who shall stand in His holy place? He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart."*)

*) Psalm 42: 2; 24: 3, 4.

He that hath a pure heart! May you also teach and admonish one another in the spiritual songs of the new Israel:

Endue us, Lord, with strength
To triumph over sin:
That we may with Thy saints at length
Eternal glory win!

The pure heart, which sees God—most holy task in life,
most blessed revelation of God! Therefore I say once more:
We ought to pray for a pure heart every day. Amen.



VIII.

CHILDREN OF PEACE ARE CALLED CHILDREN OF GOD.

Matthew 5: 9.—Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.

This seventh beatitude speaks of the peacemakers. They are not other people than the poor in spirit, the meek, the merciful, in short, the hearers and doers of the Sermon on the Mount that have been mentioned before. Jesus here only means a new aspect of their character.

To the wicked indeed there is no peace, no inward and therefore also no outward peace. Speaking generally, we must yet live in a world of strife. Looking upon the history of mankind, we see the sword of war doing bloody work throughout all the centuries. When we went to school we committed to memory the leading dates of history, and they were mostly dates and records of war, conquest and the misery of nations. At the present time men no longer play so carelessly with the fire of war, but they must ever have the sharp sword in their hands in order to guard the peace. If in our own time deliberations have been carried on with a view to promoting peace among the nations, it is nothing but the awakening of the consciousness that all mankind is called upon to preserve peace and not to wage war. Such efforts should not be held in contempt as has unfortunately been done. Is the world really to be forever under the curse of war? Even from an-

tiquity, with its warlike spirit, we hear voices of longing after peace. Croesus says, according to Herodotus: "Who would be so foolish as to choose war instead of peace? In time of peace the fathers are buried by their children, but in time of war the children by their fathers." In the Middle Ages, when so often the brutal law of the strong hand prevailed, they tried to limit deeds of violence at least to a few days of the week by the so-called "truce of God." From Thursday evening till Monday morning no one was to offer violence to his fellowman. For on Thursday evening Jesus had instituted His Holy Supper of peace. On Friday God had created man, and on a Friday He had redeemed him through Christ. On this day there was to be peace. On Saturday the Father had rested from His works and the Son of God had lain in the grave. On Sunday Jesus rose from the dead and greeted His disciples: "Peace be unto you!" On all these days Christians were to keep peace, though it must be said this "truce of God" was often broken. But we hope for a time when there will be peace, no matter whether it is Sunday or Friday,—when there will be peace every day. The time must come when there will be peace on earth. But until that time, it is true, many more sad tragedies of discord will be enacted upon earth.

We need here think not only of actual war, but also of the inward divisions of our people. How much hostile defiance among the masses and parties, what language of discord everywhere! Brother against brother! We think also of

the immoderate, invidious criticisms, controversies, political disputes and litigations. We think especially of the fact that even between brothers and sisters and near relations, between husband and wife, children and parents, there is so much strife and discord. Recently a young girl said to me, "My father is mean and base towards me!" It grieved me to hear a child speak so disrespectfully of her own father. When I called her attention to the fourth commandment,*) she replied: "It may be true that a child ought not to speak thus of her father, but nevertheless he is base and mean. We are at enmity with each other." Alas, how many people, who really are closely related, are at enmity with each other. *Are you perhaps also at enmity with someone?*

Into this world of strife Jesus calls, "Blessed are the peacemakers!" and He calls the peacemakers the children of God.

CHILDREN OF PEACE ARE CALLED CHILDREN OF GOD.

We consider:

1. The holy commission which they carry out.
2. The glorious name which they receive.

O Lord, do Thou again in this quiet hour guide our feet into the way of peace. O Thou God of peace, grant unto us

*) The fourth according to the Lutheran, the fifth according to the Reformed division of the commandments. *Translator.*

gréat grace, so that we may be at peace with Thee and with men. Grant unto us Thy Holy Spirit and a forgiving disposition after Thine own heart, so that in times of joy and sorrow, by evil report and good report, we may prove ourselves to be the servants and children of God, because children of peace. Let our words and our ways please Thee and do Thou even make our enemies to be at peace with us. Give us to-day new instruction and saving knowledge from Thy word of peace. Amen.

1.

Blessed are the peacemakers! To make peace—it is a holy, divine action! That father made peace who forgave the prodigal son and kissed his impure lips. God made peace (speaking literally) with sinful humanity. Jesus made peace when He reconciled us to God.*) Read the Scriptures and notice how often the word “peace” is found. The gospel is called the gospel of peace. Jesus Himself is called our peace (Ephesians 2: 14). We will not be able to make peace in this world, if we have not the true peace in our heart. But the Prince of Peace will give it unto us. His greeting was always a greeting of peace, and this was His parting word to

*) The expression “to make peace,” which we find in this beatitude, is employed in Colossians 1: 20 to denote Christ’s work of redemption.

His disciples: "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you."

This is the peace which the world can not give us. The apostles wrote at the beginning of their epistles: "Grace be unto you and peace!" Were these empty words? Was it not rather a desire, a prayer and a gift? When Jesus sent His disciples forth upon the highways and into the homes of men, He commanded them to say upon entering a house, "Peace be to this house!" And if a son of peace were there, He said, their peace should rest upon him; if not, their peace should turn to them again. And how often did He dismiss those whom He had instructed, or cleansed and healed, with the words, "Go in peace!" In our divine services we would offer you "the peace of God, which passeth all understanding." Especially do we put Aaron's benediction as a Word of God and a gift of peace upon your head and into your heart: "And give thee peace!"—Blessed peace, which we are permitted to distribute! And even upon those who have departed this life we pronounce a blessed word of peace. Our cemeteries we call places of peaceful rest. Why? Do we only want to express the thought that there is rest in death? The peace of the cemetery, the rest of the dead—is this true peace? No, rather would we give expression to the thought that dying Christians depart in peace, like Simeon, and that our cemeteries are the courts of a peaceful eternity.

Blessed are those who make peace in this world. The

Scripture calls beautiful the feet of him that publisheth peace. There are interpreters who believe that this beatitude chiefly refers to those who proclaim the gospel of peace and thus publish the peace of God. Blessed office, to make peace by proclaiming it.

But we should not merely publish and receive this peace, we must also keep and establish it everywhere and in every way. We should seek it and follow it (1. Peter 3: 11; Hebrew 12: 14), because it may so easily be lost in the bustle of life. The God of peace demands that we live at peace with each other. Think of Abraham, who was so eager to keep peace with his nephew, who was younger than he. "Let there be no strife!" "For we are brethren." "If thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right!" This is for all time a beautiful example of peaceableness. Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! Luther is right: "There is indeed half the kingdom of heaven where there is peace." May we take care never to snap a bond of peace. Discord will always be a cause of much unhappiness. Solomon writes (Proverbs 18: 19), "A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city." Such a discord may follow a man to the last hour of his life, and how can he thus appear before the God of peace? As much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. It is your Christian duty, it is necessary, it is wise. Peace promotes prosperity, while discord brings on destruction.

It is certainly true, as has been said, "The very meekest cannot rest in quiet, unless it suits his ill neighbor's humor." There are people who reject the hand that offers peace. There are people who again and again sunder the ties of friendship and love by their evil conduct, their public and secret actions, their whims and moods, especially with their sharp tongue. Men without peace even find their delight in discord. They rejoice to know that others are quarreling. They fan the flame of discord instead of extinguishing it. In the book of Ecclesiasticus we read, "A sinful man disquieteth friends, and scattereth calumny among them that be at peace." In this way many have been separated who were on friendly terms. Here we often can do nothing but commend the matter to God: "Father, forgive them!"

But let us all be on our guard! The human heart is easily offended. One cannot but be surprised at the mere trifles over which so many fall out. People who were formerly friends, no longer enter each other's house and avoid meeting each other. We should always forgive, and seek to remove misunderstandings that may arise, before an angry strife results from them. We ought to retract hasty words and try to atone for a fault. We should at the very beginning of trouble make peace, and not wait, as many wait with an operation. It is necessary, therefore, do it soon! Otherwise it will become a great deal worse. Thus the peace-loving are always ready to make peace. We should think much of our own faults and

diligently call to our mind the good traits of others. We should make it our rule to study men more charitably. Luther says in his explanation of this text, "There is no man on earth so wicked who has not something in him that must be praised." Then he reminds us of the pious mother of Augustine, Monica. When she knew of two friends at variance, she would always speak the best of both. If she heard something good of the one, she carried it to the other. But when she heard something evil, she kept it secret, or excused it as best she could. Thus she reconciled many. Blessed are the peacemakers!

Have you ever made peace? If the piano is out of tune we call a piano tuner. But one need not, in order to bring harmony out of human discord, be an official justice of the peace, whose office is beautiful, but very often difficult and ineffective. What did Jacob do when he returned to Canaan where his hostile brother Esau lived? A whole night he wrestled with God in prayer, and especially did he pray that he might find peace with his brother at home. Not only upon men, but also upon God, who guides the hearts of men, you may call for help so that peace may be restored. Have you ever thus made peace?

And when you make peace, let it not be an affected, external relation, by which the inward discord is only veiled and covered up. Why such hypocrisy? A certain feeling will tell your fellowman that in reality you are not his friend. The main point is to make peace entirely and heartily! Blessed are the peacemakers.

Especially should there be peace among Christian brethren. They ought to keep the war of human passions entirely in subjection among themselves. Jesus prayed, "That they all may be one!" The first Christians at Jerusalem also were of one heart and of one soul. Paul censured the Corinthians sharply, because there existed among them opposing parties, some of them saying, "I am of Paul," others, "I am of Apollos," others, "I of Cephas." You may ask whether there has not been discord in the Church at many other times. To this I must answer, yes. But some times a conflict was necessary. Luther says in connection with this passage of the Sermon on the Mount: "But if you ask, Why do you publicly attack the Pope and others, and do not keep peace yourself? To this I reply, It is true that we should put the best construction upon everything, and in order to keep peace, pass over in silence everything that can be kept secret. But when sin is so notorious and is gaining ground everywhere, or is doing public harm (as is the case with the doctrine of the Pope), then one dare no longer be silent, but must resist and rebuke." Even the ancient prophet warned against saying "Peace, peace," when there is no peace. Jesus Himself said in this sense, "I came not to send peace, but a sword." Is not His holy Sermon on the Mount itself a declaration of war against the false Judaism of the Pharisees? Shame upon those who explain this saying about the peacemakers as though it meant that we must pass over in silence all error and every

grievance. They tread softly and are expert in accommodating their views to prevailing opinions. They think it advisable to please all men, especially the mighty. They are wise as serpents, but as treacherous too. This enables them to make headway in this world and to gain success. Is this a peaceable disposition?—Jesus did not want this kind of peaceableness, for it is contrary to the truth. But in other respects, make peace! Blessed are the children of peace. We have seen the holy commission which they carry out.

2.

The glorious name which they receive. They shall be called the children of God. They are children of God, because they are like their Father, who is not a God of disorder, but a God of peace. In the Greek text it reads, they shall be called the “sons of God.” Because they have adopted the character of the Son of God, the heavenly prince of peace, Jesus calls them after Himself: “Sons of God,” or children of God.

One must indeed ask whether we are not already children of God through baptism and through faith. Paul writes expressly (Galatians 3: 26): “For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus; for as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” But the same apostle supplements this when he says (Romans 8: 14): “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.” We

must also make our calling and election sure by the peace which we keep. Children of peace are called children of God.

Is to be *called* more or less than to *be*? Here it is more than to be. They *are* not merely the children of God, they shall also be called thus. It is true, something seems to have been omitted in this beatitude; it is not said by whom they are called thus, whether by God, or by men, or both. We may assume the latter. Men also will know that because of their peaceable disposition, they may be called children of peace.

There are positions, titles and names to which men often attach an exaggerated value, so that one is often afraid to designate them lest it should be with a false or perhaps too humble a title. But there can be no higher position, no more glorious name than "Children of God." Unto this we should aspire. What are all the Privy Councillors, all the Excellencies and Majesties of the world, compared with this: Children of God! They are not called high, rich and happy; no, they are called blessed. There are two passages in the Bible where God Himself is called "the Blessed."*) This expression does not occur anywhere else. The Scripture seems to consider this attribute as self-evident. In one of these passages God is called "the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords; who only hath immortality." Think of it,—His children! We do not realize vividly enough what that

*) 1. Timothy 1: 11; 6: 15.

means,—Children of God. “And if children, then heirs.” Blessed like Him! Let us be quiet children of peace, so that we may become blessed children of God.

Ah, then my spirit faints
To reach the land I love,
The bright inheritance of saints,
Jerusalem above!

May it be with us! With golden letters of heavenly glory this name is written into the book of life: “Children of God.”

Beloved friends in the Lord! “Blessed are the peacemakers.” Another short sentence with great contents. Many people do not know much of the Bible, but they know these precious, beautiful beatitudes. There is hardly a Christian who does not know them by heart. But let us also have these wonderful sayings within our heart, devoutly meditate upon them, daily observe them. It is my prayer that it may be thus. May he who has no peace seek it in Christ! May he who has peace in Him, go forward and publish it! May he who has broken a bond of peace heal it again this day! May he who knows of people who live in discord, bring them together, as a mediator and conciliator, like Jesus! If men would thus do, strife would disappear from life, each small discord and finally also the great bloody war, and there would be peace, peace on earth. There would be blessed children of peace in this world, all children of God. O, may you then keep this in mind and observe it: Blessed are the peacemakers. Amen.

IX.

PERSECUTED, REVILED AND YET REJOICING.

Matthew 5: 10—12.—Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for My sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

Luke 6: 22, 23, 26.—Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake. Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy: for behold, your reward is great in heaven: for in the like manner did their fathers unto the prophets. Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! for so did their fathers to the false prophets.

Among the nine qualifications of an evangelical preacher, which Luther once enumerated, he finally names one that is peculiar. "In the ninth place," he writes, "he must suffer himself to be tormented and scoffed at by everybody." Thus our Lord Jesus Christ also added to the beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount a final one which speaks of obloquy and persecution. Does Jesus here speak only to the disciples? Recently I found a piece of paper in my letter-box, upon which I read

these words: "Christianity is a lie. You are a scoundrel, because you preach it." In this manner the hatred of the world still thinks, writes, works and raves to-day.

In this last beatitude Jesus will lead us upon a great height. I do not know whether all will be willing to follow. On great heights we are more solitary, and the air is chilly. But—did you not hear it?—no beatitude has the Lord treated more at length, upon none has He bestowed more abundant praise. His last, greatest, most glorious "Blessed" is meant for you, who are willing to suffer cheerfully even the abuse and condemnation of men for righteousness' sake! Not as though condemnation and persecution were not painful. It is very bitter to the flesh. And yet we read, "Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy!" Sorrow and joy can be blended wonderfully in the life of true Christians. Children can often be sad and joyful in a single hour, laughing and crying in the same breath. Surely he who can do this is either a child or a saint.

In the beatitude preceding this the Lord had thought of the activity of His disciples, who must proclaim and establish peace in the world. But for this they were not to expect as compensation the gratitude and approbation of men. On the contrary, it was the lot of the disciples and apostles to be persecuted by men, to be reviled in the world!

To speak about our Lord—this is great and glorious. To act in His love—this is greater and more glorious. But to

suffer cheerfully for His sake—this is greatest and most glorious. This is the test whether we really love Him. Persecuted, reviled for His sake—blessed are you! Many commentators remark in connection with this verse, that it is a matter of surprise how the history of the coming centuries stood before the eyes of the Savior when He spoke these words.*) In other passages of the Scriptures also Jesus foretold all these things, so that His disciples might remember His words when it should all come to pass.**)

Therefore His servants, apostles, martyrs and witnesses were not surprised when all this happened. From these words of Jesus they derived great strength of heart, comfort, courage and joy. They knew that also these sufferings were a powerful testimony for the truth, a visible sermon upon their faith. When the English bishop Latimer was about to be burned at the stake because of his evangelical faith, he exclaimed to Ridley, his companion in martyrdom, “Be of good comfort, master Ridley, and play the man: we shall this day light such a candle, by God’s grace, in England, as I trust shall never be put out!” But in this beatitude the Lord opens unto us still another prospect. He leads us to the pearly gates and the golden streets.

There is the throne of David;
And there, from care released,
The song of them that triumph,
The shout of them that feast;

*) Tholuck and others.

**) Matthew 10: 16—18; John 16: 1—4.

And they who, with their Leader,
Have conquered in the fight,
For ever and for ever
Are clad in robes of white!

For theirs is the kingdom of heaven! Although persecuted, reviled, abused, they are even here on earth rejoicing in hope, full of joy! Let this be the subject of our meditation to-day:

PERSECUTED, REVILED, AND YET REJOICING.

1. Persecuted for righteousness' sake.
2. Reviled for Christ's sake.
3. Rejoicing because of a great reward.

Lord, do thou speak to us with the Word and Spirit of Thy mouth. Thou hast called us to Thee and into Thy holy and blessed kingdom, but it is Thy will that we steadfastly suffer a while and willingly bear the cross of abuse and rejection. When we are persecuted by the hatred of men, grant unto us Thy Spirit, that we may also understand this and may not be filled with bitterness, but that our love may become stronger. Help us that we may not remain in the cave of discontent, but with a faith that is superior to sufferings go forth to overcome the world and render good for evil. Encourage, instruct, strengthen, edify us through Thy faithful, saving Word. Amen.

1.

“Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake.” Merely to be persecuted does not make us blessed. No,

persecuted for righteousness' sake. One can also be persecuted as an evildoer. "What glory is it—" asks Peter. But when you do well, for righteousness' sake!—these are the most painful buffets from the hands of men, and these the Scripture calls "acceptable with God" (1. Peter 2: 20). "For righteousness' sake." In the fourth beatitude we read, "hunger and thirst after righteousness," full and entire. Here it is only, "for righteousness' sake," for the sake of any righteous action or disposition. When Jesus afterwards says, "Persecuted for My sake," this is no great difference; it is only a climax. It means as much as "because you believe in Me and follow Me." A Christian, a righteous man is always a walking reproach to the unjust. He is a rock beaten by many waves. As Christ is, so are they that are His. The servant is not greater than his lord. Jesus said, "If they have persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept My saying, they will keep yours also." Paul calls himself and the other apostles the filth of the world and the offscouring of all things. In the narrative of his conversion we find the word of the Lord: "I will shew him how great things he must suffer for My name's sake" (Acts 9: 16). Ah, If the world were only like the first Christian congregation of Ephesus, of which we read in the book of Revelation (chapter 2), that they could not bear them which are evil. History and experience rather tell us that the world cannot bear them that are good. Therefore it is written (2. Timothy 3: 12), that "all who will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution."

On this subject of persecutions we might speak for many hours. Our forefathers said when reflecting upon these bloody sufferings, they did not believe that as many sacrificial lambs had been slain in the Old Testament as pious Christians in the New Testament. They were crucified like Jesus, stoned, burned, cut to pieces, beaten to death, plunged into water, thrown before wild beasts—there was no torment and no manner of death which the children of God did not suffer on earth. They suffered like the prophets of old, of whom Jesus here speaks, and of whom we read in the parable of the wicked husbandmen: “And the husbandmen took his servant, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another” (Matthew 21: 35). Upon them was pronounced the sentence of persecution and annihilation by the world, as upon Paul by the Jews in Jerusalem: “Away with such a fellow from the earth: for it is not fit that he should live!” (Acts 22: 22.) Superstition also was active; Tertullian writes of his time: “As soon as the smallest misfortune came, everybody clamored, ‘To the lions with the Christians! then it will be better.’” These persecutions have always been carried on. What the poet*) says is true, though the word *foolishly* we cannot endorse here:

Who their full hearts so foolishly revealed,
Nor thoughts, nor feelings, from the mob concealed,
Have died on crosses, or in flames been thrown.

*) Goethe. Faust I.

But these people were not therefore unhappy. These witnesses never complained nor wailed. There were even some who longed for the thorny crown of martyrdom, who could lament because they did not obtain it! Imprisoned, tormented and yet blessed! If to-day the same persecutions prevailed, could we endure them? Could we? Many so-called heretics, who were slaughtered in the Middle Ages and at the time of the Reformation, were often the best Christians, persecuted “for righteousness’ sake.” The stake, the inquisition, the massacre of St. Bartholomew, the dragonnades, the sufferings of our forefathers in the Thirty Year’s War—all these were persecutions “for righteousness’ sake.” Compared with this we have to-day a very effeminate, debilitated, wordly Christianity, no longer the old, genuine Christianity of the time of the apostles and of the Reformation.

Rejoice, and be exceeding glad! The Revelation of St. John describes those who did not love their lives unto the death (chapter 12: 10—12). Have we no longer such examples? In our own time a missionary,*) departing for his field of labor, put a wreath of thorns around his picture. He obtained in heathen lands what he had anticipated. Another missionary who was discouraged and wanted to be released from his hardships, was instructed, “Remain and die!” A hard word, but necessary. And he remained, though he did

*) Missionary Bräuniger on his departure from Neuen-dettelsau; he died July 23rd, 1860.

not die. Or do you want other examples out of everyday life? In an hour of sorrow a young wife wrote to her father, "I cannot live another three months with my irascible husband." There are many quiet sufferers. But the reply was, "My child, you must be patient and get used to it." For thirty-five years she lived with the man from whom she wanted to escape, in great patience and fidelity, and when he died, she was deeply afflicted. I do not know whether you are just now among the oppressed, tormented and persecuted. But if this is the case, I charge you, my dear suffering friend, do not be surprised because you are treated ungratefully, rudely, shamefully "for righteousness' sake." No, rejoice and be exceeding glad! He who will reward you is living and even now he surrounds you with His heavenly cherubim as with an invisible wall. Luther remarks on this verse: "If there are one or two who persecute us, there are over against these many more, yea ten thousand angels, who are on our side to encourage and comfort us and call us blessed."

But one more thought: Do not deceive yourself by using our beatitude improperly! Perhaps once upon a time you went to work the wrong way, or you may have been very headstrong and obstinate. Or you may be very easily offended. Or perhaps you make too great pretensions. Yet you complain, because you consider yourself persecuted for righteousness' sake! Thus in the Roman Church they always complain when their worldly pretensions are not heeded and their desire of

dominion is not gratified in every country. They assert that they are persecuted for righteousness' sake, and call their Pope a prisoner. May the Lord in this respect also grant to all a correct understanding of His Word! This is our first part: Persecuted for righteousness' sake.

2.

Reviled for Christ's sake. "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you for My sake." And Luke writes, "When they shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake." Whereas before Jesus has been speaking of acts of persecution, here He speaks of the words of hatred and abuse with which the disciples of Christ would be persecuted. In antiquity the question was propounded by a wise man, What is the best and at the same time the worst part of man? The reply was: the best and at the same time the worst part of man is the tongue. Similarly the Scripture says: "Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God" (James 3: 9). Even that which is most sublime it can disparage and tarnish. It can rail against human authority and God Himself. Why should it not attack His children with malice and falsehood, slander them and say all manner of evil against them?

"For My sake," Jesus says. The name Christian was at first a term of reproach. They even abused and reviled our

holy Lord on the bloody cross of His sufferings. In this manner also were His own reviled. The ancient teachers of the Church said, "The Christians are condemned because of their name, not because of any vice." If they had been of the world, the world would have loved his own, but Jesus had chosen them out of the world. As Christians may you not grieve over it, but rejoice and be exceeding glad, when men traduce your name as evil.

How many people desire to have a great name! How do they themselves proclaim their name to the world to make it renowned and celebrated. They can not live without the high opinion and the favor of the world. But is this the spirit of Christianity? Luke subjoined (as often in the Sermon on the Mount) a Woe unto the Blessed: "Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! for so did their fathers (the Jews) to the false prophets!" The favor of the world which so many run after, is after all nothing but the attractive fruit of treacherous temptation. It was best for the early Christians that they did not enjoy this favor of the world. Through the favor of the world and intimate intercourse with it we become too much involved in its sin. When Peter mixed with the people of the world in that night of Christ's sufferings, and sat in the seat of the scornful, he denied his Lord. He was afraid of the condemnation of a maidservant and did not want to lose the favor of those around him. Later he was willing to be reviled for Christ's sake, and found his delight in it.

Many have told me that they have been reviled and have been called canting hypocrites, because they regularly attend divine services. May you also rejoice and be exceeding glad! This small abuse, which the ungodly heap upon you, should always be considered an honor. Perhaps evil things have been said about you. There is hardly any one who must not suffer this. Lies have been spread about better people than we are.

To be sure, Jesus expressly subjoins the word “falsely.” If there is anything true and justifiable in the evil reports about us, we certainly should not apply this beatitude of the Lord to ourselves. But if people say it falsely, then we may rejoice and be exceeding glad! And though they may heap upon us the most bitter abuse, we will not be embittered. “Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy!” Rejoice, for it is a good sign when the ungodly attack you with their evil, biting tongues. You know that it is not the worst fruits that are liked by the wasps. The great prophets had to experience the same thing. Here I must think again of Luther’s explanation of this beatitude. How much abuse was heaped upon him and how many lies were told about him! Until his death, and afterward, even to our own time, his name was calumniated. But what a Christian, constant disposition did he maintain in spite of all this abuse! He says regarding this passage of the Sermon on the Mount: “He who means to be a Christian, must know that he has to expect such persecutions of venomous, malicious, slanderous tongues, that the whole world will throw

insults at him, carp and strike at him. But he must boldly despise all this, and laugh at it in the name of God." This is our second part: Reviled for Christ's sake.

3.

Rejoicing because of a great reward. Now we hear why we ought to rejoice and be exceeding glad, leap for joy and be jubilant: "Great is your reward in heaven." One might indeed ask, whether righteousness has not its own reward, and whether there is not dignity, comfort and joy just in following Christ. Certainly! The apostles departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted *worthy* to suffer shame for Christ's name. In many passages of the Scripture we find a holy exultation on account of sufferings,—the triumph of those who have conquered—the world. With calmness and cheerfulness, and with hymns of praise, thousands of martyrs have stood at the stake. Mysterious powers of peace, nay even joy, are hidden in the depths of godly sorrow.

This also must be to us a cause of joy that we are in such high, distinguished company, when we are persecuted for righteousness' sake and reviled for Christ's sake. Jesus expressly calls the attention of the disciples to this in the sermon on the Mount: "For so persecuted they the prophets which were before you." Prophets, apostles, witnesses, martyrs, reformers are our companions. Rejoice and be exceeding glad!

The Lord however does not mean that we should seek de-

light only in the depth of sorrow. Here and in many other places He speaks of a great reward in heaven. Is it then for reward that we are serving under the yoke of disgrace? Dear friends! The reward in heaven will be a natural result, a harvest from the holy, earthly sowing in tears. Why direct the tearful gaze to the dust of the earth? Righteousness, abuse for Christ's sake must be valued higher and will receive a greater reward than the earth can give. In eternity it will be fully unfolded what we have been here on earth, and there our endeavors for the eternal kingdom will be rewarded. Even of Moses it is written that he esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect to the recompense of the reward (Hebrew 11: 26). Especially of those who are wise we read that they shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever. Therefore rejoicing because of a great reward! Rejoice and leap for joy!

We'll crowd Thy gates with thankful songs,
High as the heavens our voices raise;
And earth, with her ten thousand tongues,
Shall fill Thy courts with sounding praise.

Here ends the first part of the precious Sermon on the Mount, here the beatitudes come to a close. Like a chain of pearls they are linked together and the conclusion is like the beginning. In the first as well as in the last beatitude we find the same word: "Theirs is the kingdom of heaven." And

with what other word could I better close this part of the Sermon on the Mount than with this greatest, most glorious, most blessed declaration: "Theirs is the kingdom of heaven." How often have we seen the brightness of the heavenly kingdom in these beatitudes! There is however a difference between the same word in the first and in this last beatitude. Between these two declarations there lies so much. In the last we are a great deal nearer to the kingdom of heaven. God grant that with each beatitude we may have advanced higher on the ladder to heaven.

In these beatitudes especially may we find blessedness. When the world shall close its doors to us, may we see the doors of heaven ajar, as did Stephen when he was dying. When the dust of the world is vanishing, when the phantoms of this life are all dissolved, when every earthly treasure falls into the deep abyss of death, may this sentence appear before the breaking eyes of the faithful and just: "Theirs is the kingdom of heaven!" Then also before the tearful eyes of those who are left behind, who stand sorrowing at the grave, shall appear the great, the positive, the joyful and most blessed word of Jesus: "Theirs is the kingdom of heaven!" Amen.

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